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OPINION METER
This week's poll:

Should the CNMI lease one of its Northern Islands to Japan, which plan to use it as dumping/recycling site for debris from the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami?

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Manila is seeking international support in its standoff with China.

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FOCUS

Social Security is rushing even faster toward insolvency, driven by retiring baby boomers.

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LIFE & STYLE

The hype for The Avengers has been building for years and it couldn't possibly be more deafening at this point.

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DUE TO NON-PAYMENT SINCE LAST YEAR

Dental clinics turn away Medicaid patients

By MONETH G. DEPOSA
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REPORTER

Parents of Head Start students are now scrambling to find dental clinics for their children after several private clinics recently stopped accepting Medicaid clients due to the nonpayment of reimbursements.

At Seventh-Day Adventist Clinic, employee Imee Fernandez confirmed yesterday that services for Medicaid clients are temporarily on hold since March 13 this year after the clinic failed to collect unpaid obligations from Medicaid. She said the suspension is in effect until further notice.

Also suspending similar services is Dental Care Clinic, which took effect since two months ago. Like Seventh-Day Adventist, Dental Care is unsure as to when it will re-implement the program and that it will depend on the payment made by the government, which handles

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Fact-finding mission on possible Japanese military training on Tinian

By HAIDEE V. EUGENIO
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REPORTER

A seven-member delegation from Japan's Ministry of Defense visited Tinian yesterday for what Japan and CNMI officials called a "fact-finding" mission on the possible use of Tinian for Japanese military training alongside U.S. forces as part of realignment in the region.

Yesterday's visit is independent of the scheduled training of some 200 U.S. Marines from Okinawa on Tinian in May to June.

Tinian Mayor Ramon Dela Cruz, in a phone interview after the Japanese delegation left Tinian, said the fact-finding visit gave local officials a chance to pitch Tinian's advantages as a possible training site for Japanese forces.

"First is Tinian's proximity to Japan. It's only about three hours [by commercial plane]. There are existing runways suited for military training such as Runway Baker, away from the

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Tinian Mayor Ramon Dela Cruz's chief of staff and historian Don Farrell, fourth from right, gives a fact-finding delegation from Japan's Ministry of Defense a tour yesterday of the historic North Field on Tinian, which could be used to train Japanese forces alongside U.S. forces.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Police find no foul play in man's death

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
Saipan Tribune
REPORTER

Police and medics have established that there was no foul play in the death of a Filipino steelman at the American Memorial Park near Micro Beach on Sunday night.

Police said yesterday that Arnel M. Orbita's initial cause of death was ruled as sudden cardiac arrest or heart attack.

Saipan Tribune learned that the 40-year-old Orbita was with a woman when the incident happened.

Police said that medics transported Orbita, who was already unresponsive at the time, from the American Memorial Park to the Commonwealth Health Center where he was pronounced dead by a doctor at 9:53pm.

Saipan Tribune learned that prior to the incident, Orbita and some friends were drinking outside Orbita's house in Chalan Kanoa. After their drinking session, the group ended up at the Saipan cockpit in Garapan. Shortly before the start of the cockfight at 7:45pm, Orbita left and boarded a taxi that already had another passenger, a woman. The woman was said to be Orbita's companion when he died.

Police said the female witness disclosed that she and Orbita were playing billiards and drinking at Sands Bar in western Garapan when they

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Joint panel OKs $11.58M line of credit for CHC

By HAIDEE V. EUGENIO
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REPORTER

A back-to-back session of the Senate and House of Representatives today could pave the way for the passage of a conference committee bill authorizing the Marianas Public Land Trust to give up to $11.58-million line of credit to the Commonwealth Healthcare Corp.

The $11.58 million includes the $3 million already provided to CHC as well as a $1.58 million loan for the hospital's electronic system, leaving up to $7 million in additional line of credit.

The bill was bouncing back between the House and the Senate since December, and lawmakers' inability to pass it swiftly drew criticism from

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RELATED NEWS

Tinian, Rota health centers next target of emergency layoffs.

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Girl, 4, passes away after near drowning. PAGE 3

Local

‘Smoke-testing’ on to identify sewer system defects

By MONETH G. DEPOSA
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REPORTER

The Commonwealth Utilities Corp. on Monday began “smoke-testing” some areas and villages to check for leaks, breaks, and defects in the island’s sewer system.

The test will be done in three places—Gualo Rai, San Jose, and Oleai—from April 23 to May 11. It involves forcing smoke into the sewer lines to check for defects, according to CUC deputy executive director Alan Fletcher.

Fletcher described the smoke as odorless, creates no fire hazard, and will not enter homes or businesses unless they have defective plumbing or dried-up sink traps or floor drains. The smoke test should affect properties no longer than 15 minutes, he added.

He said the smoke used for this test is manufactured strictly for this purpose, leaves no residues or stains, and has no effect on plants and animals. However, direct contact with the smoke may cause minor respiratory irritation in some people, he warned.

CUC advises that if people in the building suffer from a heart condition, asthma, emphysema, or some other respiratory condition and are planning to stay in the building during the test, they can notify the CUC wastewater operations at 322-5032 and 322-5033 to discuss their specific case.

“Prior to testing, please pour two gallons of water in any seldom-used sinks and floor drains to prevent sewer gas, smoke and odors from entering the premises. If smoke does enter your home during testing, immediately remove yourself from the building, notify the crews that are conducting the test or call CUC. Again, if smoke enters your home, it is an indication of a plumbing defect, so you should also notify a plumber,” a CUC statement said.

According to Fletcher, correcting any defects is the responsibility of the property owner. Smoke coming from vent stacks in houses is normal while smoke coming from holes in the ground is not normal and is considered a defect. All such defects will be logged, according to Fletcher, and CUC will contact the property owner if a defect is located on private property.

“This smoke testing is part of CUC’s continuing effort to provide a safe, economical, efficient, and environmentally sound sewer system. The smoke testing procedure has been recommended by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as an effective means of identifying problem areas in the sewer system. Eliminating system defects and illegal connections will help our community remain in compliance with the federal legislation regarding sewer systems maintenance and sanitary sewer overflows,” added Fletcher.

‘NMDs are already losing their land because of Article 12’

By CLARISSA V. DAVID
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REPORTER

A member of the non-profit group Citizens for Change of Article 12 emphasized yesterday that persons of Northern Marianas descent are already losing their lands, dismissing the prevalent misconception that NMDs will lose their lands only when the CNMI’s land alienation provision in the Constitution is repealed.

“And they’re [NMD’s] losing it for pennies,” said Vincent J. Seman, a guest speaker at the Rotary Club of Saipan membership meeting at the Hyatt Regency Saipan.

CCART12 is composed of “concerned individuals” actively pushing for the repeal of Article 12, which they claim hinders economic growth.

Seman said that Article 12 was supposed to protect NMDs from outside investors that want to take advantage of their lands. Presently, though, it could not protect these NMDs from other NMDs.

Seman

Sablan

Another CCART12 member, Alex Sablan, underlined that there is a small pool of NMD buyers in the Commonwealth “and they are setting the pace and scale” for properties on the islands, giving birth to an “artificial ceiling” of land values.

“Because we have such a small pool, land values hit rock-bottom prices,” said Sablan, who recounted stories of NMD families facing financial constraints and are forced to sell their properties for lower than their actual market value—a practice that has become common due to Article 12.

Seman noted that Article 12 also brings about foreclosures in the CNMI since it restricts a person’s ability to refinance a loan given that commercial banks are “scared” to deal with the land alienation clause.

“Under the Article 12 provision, what it means is that banks have a very limited narrow scope of being able to own fee simple for a very short time,” he said.

“I believe and we believe that my generation and the future generations are going to be completely disenfranchised by virtue of the fact that there isn’t accessible credit on this island for good lending or for good opportunity to do business,” added Sablan.

He also pointed out that the issue of blood quantum “dilution” is a serious one that needs to be changed. Right now, among those considered NMDs are individuals who have 25 percent Chamorro or Carolinian blood.

According to Sablan, NMDs who choose to marry “somebody outside the culture” or a non-NMD “shouldn’t have to be relegated to have their children lose property because they lose their blood quantum.

Seman said there is “inequity” in the definition of NMDs, which he described as political. For example, an individual with 25-percent NMD married to a non-NMD will bear children who will only be 12.5-percent NMD. On the other hand, if an NMD adopts a child who is not from the Commonwealth, the child is considered full-blooded NMD by virtue of Article 12.

Seman stressed that voters will have the chance to put on the ballot this November the decision whether to repeal or retain Article 12. Section 805 of the Covenant allows the CNMI to revisit its land alienation restrictions 25 years after the termination of the Trusteeship Agreement in 1986. That 25-year period ended in 2011.

CCART12 is currently conducting a petition to put the initiative “To propose a constitutional amendment for the people of the Northern Mariana Islands to vote to repeal Article 12” on the Nov. ballot.

“What we really emphasize is everyone should be allowed to make their own decisions based on the facts. With that, we hope that we do get support just to put it in the ballot for whatever reason, whether to keep it or if it’s time for a change,” said Seman.

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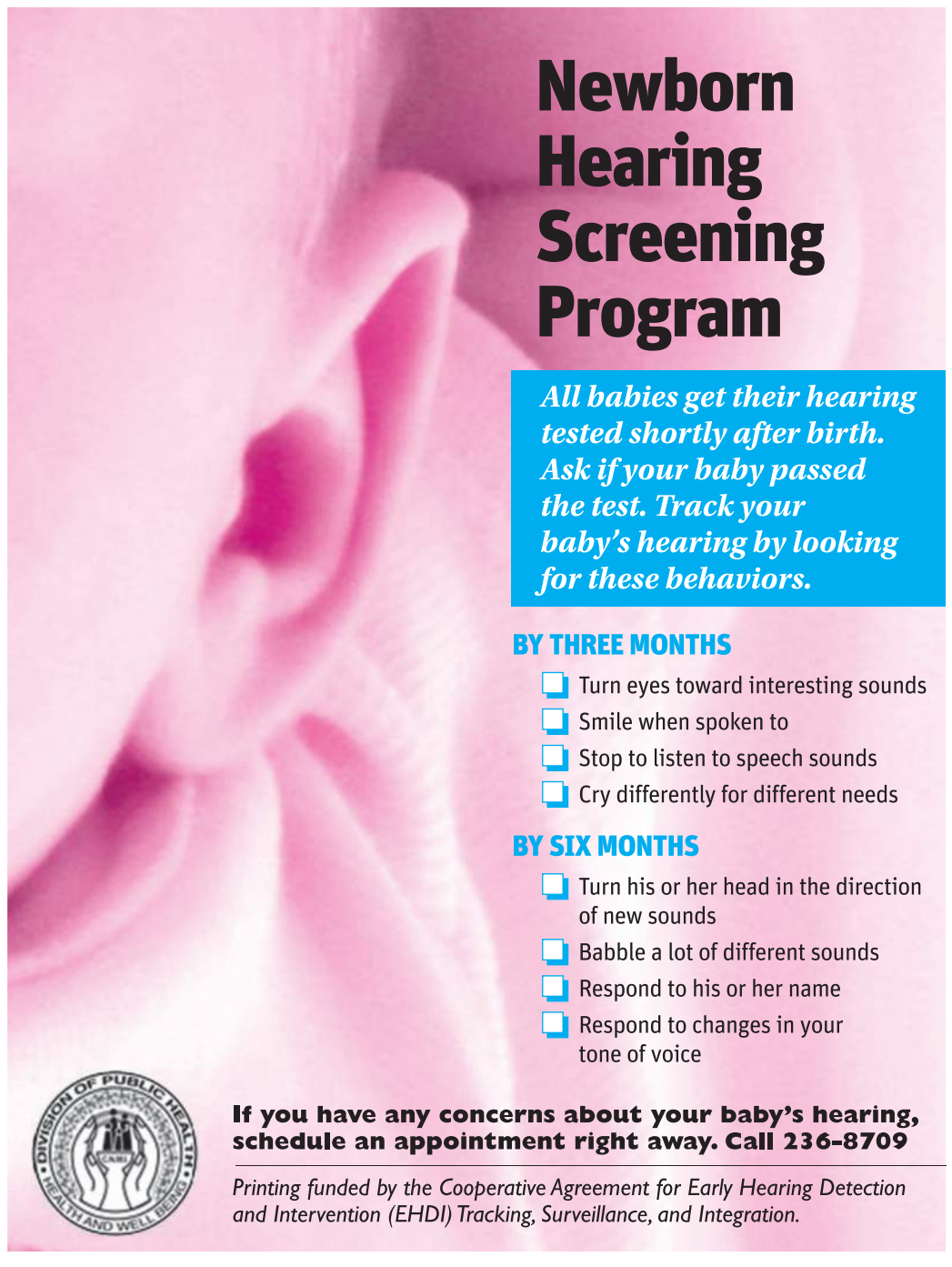
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House removes mandatory health insurance for alien workers

» Sparks fly at land compensation bill, 4 other bills passed

By HAIDEE V. EUGENIO
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REPORTER

The House of Representatives passed yesterday a 13-month-old bill that removes the mandatory requirement for CNMI employers to pay 100 percent of their foreign workers' medical insurance—a measure that some nonresidents said would force them to forego buying medical insurance altogether if employers do not commit to pay at least half of it.

Heated arguments over a land compensation bill also capped yesterday's House session, which saw the passage of six bills.

House Bill 17-147, introduced by former representative Diego T. Benavente, makes it "optional" and "voluntary" for employers to carry medical insurance for each foreign worker they employ.

HB 17-147 passed by a vote of 16-0, with four absences. It now goes to the Senate.

Rene Reyes, founding president of the Marianas Advocates for Humanitarian Affairs Ltd., said that removing this mandatory requirement for employers will further subject foreign workers to financial hardships and they could end up not having any insurance at all.

Santos

And if they do need to be hospitalized without insurance, the government hospital would have to bear the costs—at least until the foreign worker pays.

Reyes said he hopes the Senate will amend the bill to require the employer to pay at least 50 percent of their foreign workers' health insurance.

The House spent considerable time debating House Bill 17-63, which imposes a six-month deadline for private property taken under eminent domain to be properly processed and legally consummated.

Rep. Teresita Santos (Ind-Rota), author of HB 17-63, said she introduced her bill in March 2010, and members had plenty of time to have their concerns addressed.

Lawmakers said the Department of Public Lands needs some $80 million to compensate landowners for their private property taken by the government for public use such as roadways.

During yesterday's session, Rep. Joseph Palacios (R-Saipan) blamed the previous legislatures for failing to help private landowners and prevent the amount of unpaid land compensation from growing.

This didn't sit well with lawmakers who also served in previous legislatures. A heated discussion ensued.

Rep. Frank Dela Cruz (R-Saipan) said it's easy to target long-time lawmakers by members of the current House leadership that does not have a plan itself to help landowners and stem this government expense.

"For them it's a blame game. It's unfortunate it had to be brought up by Representative Palacios," Dela Cruz later said.

HB 17-63 narrowly passed. Eight voted "yes," and seven voted "no," with five absences.

The eight who voted "yes" were Speaker Eli Cabrera (R-Saipan), vice speaker Felicidad Ogumoro (Cov-Saipan), floor leader George Camacho (Ind-Saipan), Reps. Ray Basa (Cov-Saipan), Fred Deleon Guerrero (Ind-Saipan), Joseph Palacios (R-Saipan), Stanley Torres (Ind-Rota), and Teresita Santos (Ind-Rota).

The eight who voted "no" were Dela Cruz, House minority leader Joseph Deleon Guerrero (R-Saipan), Rep. Janet Maratita (Ind-Saipan), Rep. Tony Sablan (R-Saipan), Rep. Ray Tebuteb (R-Saipan), Rep. Edmund Villagomez (Cov-Saipan), and Rep. Ray Yumul (R-Saipan).

Absent were Reps. Trenton Conner (R-Tinian), Sylvester Iguel (Cov-Saipan), Ralph Demapan (Cov-Saipan), Ray Palacios (Cov-Saipan), and Froilan Tenorio (Cov-Saipan). Demapan left the chamber before voting but he voted on other bills.

The four other bills passed didn't draw lengthy discussions.

HBs 17-250 House Draft 1, 17-288, 17-293 and 17-294, HD1 each passed by a 16-0 vote.

HB 17-250 HD1, introduced by Santos, designates 2 hectares of public land on Rota for a planned Rota Public Cemetery, while Basa's HB 17-288 provides for a tax rate for foreign corporations earning income from outside the CNMI.

Demapan's HB 17-293 amends the fiscal year 2012 budget or Public Law 17-55 to designate $5 million and counted toward the state share of the required matching funds for Medicaid reimbursements to the Commonwealth Healthcare Corp.

Maratita's HB 17-294, HD1 allows the Northern Marianas College Board of Regents to make certain exceptions to the basic residency requirement set by law.

The House will hold another session today.

Girl, 4, passes away after near drowning

A 4-year-old girl who had been in intensive care after a near drowning at the Pacific Islands Club on Saturday passed away Monday night at the Commonwealth Health Center.

An official of the Department of Public Safety confirmed with the *Saipan Tribune* yesterday that a CHC doctor pronounced the girl dead at 10:03pm.

The DPS official said an investigation is still ongoing.

Police identified the girl as Nevaeh Shanae Sablan Casil. "Nevaeh" spells "Heaven" backward.

Police quoted Casil's stepfather as saying that he heard a whistle and ran to a group of people gathering at the pool Saturday afternoon. The stepfather found out that it was his stepdaughter who was being assisted. At least two persons administered CPR and revived the girl.

Medics arrived and transported Casil to CHC where she was then admitted to the Intensive Care Unit for further observation and treatment due to the presence of fluid in her lungs.

Saipan Tribune learned that the stepfather was one of the lifeguards on duty at the time. As Casil was fighting for her life at the ICU, the family decided to bring the girl to a hospital in the Philippines but paperwork apparently caused the delay. ***(Ferdie de la Torre)***

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Man arrested for alleged child exploitation

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
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REPORTER

Federal agents arrested yesterday a man who was allegedly in possession of a cellular phone that contained several images of children that included one image of the genitals of a boy.

Rogelio N. Dela Cruz, 41, was arrested on charges of sexual exploitation of children and activities relating to material constituting or containing child exploitation.

Federal Bureau of Investigation special agent Haejun Park stated in his affidavit that, on March 18, 2011, Dela Cruz was arrested on Rota by the Department of Public Safety for various charges related to possible sexual assault of a girl in Sinapalo.

The officer observed that Dela Cruz's cellphone contained several images of young children and an image of the genitals of a young boy.

When the officer asked about the image, Dela Cruz explained that he and the boy were just playing around.

Dela Cruz allegedly admitted he took the nude photo of the boy one year ago and that he forgot to erase it.

Park said, that on Friday the FBI obtained a federal search warrant to search Dela Cruz's cellphone.

Park said that several images of young children were found to include the image of the genitals of a boy.

Park said the parents identified on Monday the child on the photo as their minor child.

House OKs resolution capping 2013 budget at $102M

By HAIDEE V. EUGENIO
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REPORTER

By a vote of 10-7, the House of Representatives adopted Monday a concurrent resolution capping the fiscal year 2013 budget at $102 million as submitted by Gov. Benigno R. Fitial.

But the adoption came only after a lengthy discussion on whether the governor factored in his $102 million proposed budget the July launching of Saipan Air, which is expected to initially bring an additional 150 tourists to the CNMI.

House Speaker Eli Cabrera (R-Saipan) said the House will call in Finance Secretary Larrisa Larson and other administration officials to respond to these questions.

Lt. Gov. Eloy S. Inos, when asked for comment, said the governor's budget package already put lawmakers on notice that although the net estimate remains at $102 million, the administration anticipates seeing a gradual growth in the tourism industry in the first quarter of fiscal year 2013 with the planned inauguration of Saipan Air.

Inos also said the governor can make changes to his budget submission by July 1 or 90 days before the start of the new fiscal year.

Some of those who voted "no" to the concurrent resolution, including House minority leader Joseph Deleon Guerrero (R-Saipan) said by not clarifying the budget figures from the administration, the House isn't doing its due diligence.

DENTAL

From Page 1

the Medicaid program.

A check with Toothworks also confirmed that the clinic had stopped serving Medicaid clients until all obligations are settled.

Clinic employees interviewed by *Saipan Tribune* all disclosed that the delinquency in Medicaid payments covers several months since late last year. They declined to disclose the amount owed by the government.

The Commonwealth Healthcare Corp. recently shut down the dental office at the Commonwealth Health Center to streamline operations. This move resulted in the transfer of dental services to private clinics. Unfortunately, most of these private clinics have stopped accepting Medicaid clients.

Two other private dental clinics were also checked yesterday. One declined to comment on the issue while the other stated that it has never served Medicaid clients at all.

A single mother from San Vicente shared that she has been scouting since April 9 for a dental clinic that can accommodate her 4-year-old child. Frustrated that none of the four private clinics want to accept Medicaid dental clients, the 35-year-old mother ended up paying $30 for the dental checkup of her child.

If further test determines the child needs more dental services, this means additional money from her own pocket. Dental and physical examinations are among the major requirements of the Head Start program.

Saipan Tribune tried yesterday to obtain comments from both Medicaid administrator Helen Sablan and the governor's adviser for the program, Esther Muña, on what is causing the delay in the payment to providers. There was no statement received from either two as of press time.

The Medicaid program is administered by the state and is funded by both federal and state revenues through matching funds. Among the services covered is dental treatment of eligible children.

At the Public School System Head Start program, all enrollees are required to undergo a dental checkup as a requirement.

In an interview at the recent PSS leadership summit for parents, Education Commissioner Rita A. Sablan disclosed that this concern has been raised by PSS to the Legislature. She said that PSS will appeal to the Commonwealth Healthcare Corp. to reopen the dental clinic.

"I think we need to go back to meet with the CEO to discuss the tremendous impact of the closure of the dental clinic at CHC. There are 462 kids from Head Start who are availing of that service and we also inform about the dental/health program at PSS. So I think there's room to go back and discuss it with the CEO and see what they can do to help our children and their families," said Sablan.

She also encouraged parents to possibly include dental services in their health insurance.

FACT

From Page 1

bomb pit and away from residential areas. There's no need to lease public lands because two-thirds of the island are already by the U.S. Department of Defense, which they have been working together with," Dela Cruz told *Saipan Tribune*.

Dela Cruz said the Japanese were "very impressed" with what they saw as possible training grounds for their forces.

"They said they could have a report by May," the mayor said. "But we never spoke about money. They never even committed to spending money, but there was talk of possibly refurbishing a runway they might use."

Senate Vice President Jude U. Hofschneider (R-Tinian), chair of the Tinian Legislative Delegation, separately said that Japan is looking at Tinian as a possible training ground for their military personnel but any final decision hinges on what Japan would make of the visiting team's findings and recommendations.

"So at this time, it's premature to say that they will use Tinian for Japanese forces. However, Tinian is always open to U.S. military training because they lease two-thirds of the land. But because U.S. and Japanese forces are conducting joint training, they might see Tinian as another area where they can train together," said Hofschneider.

Gov. Benigno R. Fitial's office, meanwhile, confirmed that the governor held a teleconference with Joint Guam Program Office director Capt. Dan Cuff after the Japanese delegation's visit to Tinian.

"Captain Cuff took the opportunity to inform the governor that this is not an official high ranking Japanese delegation but representatives that were interested in a quick visit to look into the proposed force realignment currently being discussed by the U.S. and the government of Japan," press secretary Angel Demapan said.

Demapan said Cuff indicated that an official visit may be arranged and facilitated with the governor following a review of the findings of this visit.

"Governor Fitial would like to review the findings and the proposal on this matter," he added.

Delegate Gregorio Kilili Sablan (Ind-MP), who received a briefing in Washington, D.C. last week on the U.S. military's plan for the region, earlier said there's no plan to build a permanent U.S. base on Tinian at this time and that it will remain as a training site.

Island tour

The Tinian Mayor's Office released the names of the visiting Ministry of Defense officials from Japan.

They included Morio Ito, councilor at the Ministry of Defense; Ayako Kimura, counselor at the Ministry's Secretariat; Shigeyuki Uno, deputy director of the Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation Division under the Ministry's Defense Policy Bureau; and Miyatake Isao, deputy director at the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty Division, North American Affairs Bureau.

Also part of the group were Lt. Col. Mamoru Yamaura, F-X Project Office, Defense Plans and Policy Department, Air Staff Office under the Ministry; Commander Kazushi Yokota, JMSDF, of the Plans and Policy Section of the Maritime Staff Office; and Capt. Naruto Nishi, JMSDF, director of Defense and International Policy Planning

Division of the Joint Staff Office.

Col. Robert Loynd, officer-in-charge of MARFORPAC (FWD) Guam and CNMI, along with JGPO's Maj. Darren Alvarez, accompanied the Japanese delegation.

Don Farrell, the Tinian mayor's chief of staff and point man on military issues, said in a statement that the morning was spent on a historical tour of Tinian's military leased lands, including North Field, the Atomic Bomb Pits, the Atomic Bomb Assembly Building area, Unai Chulu, Unai Babui, and Mt. Laso.

Before having an island-style lunch buffet at Fleming's Restaurant, the delegation also visited the Tinian harbor.

Joining the visitors at Fleming's for a luncheon hosted by the Tinian mayor were Hofschneider, Sen. Frank Cruz (R-Tinian), Tinian Municipal Council chair Estevan Cabrera, Council vice chair Jose Cruz, Delegate Gregorio Sablan's Tinian District Office director Matthew Masga, and cadet Kenneth Cruz, a Tinian High School graduating senior.

Farrell quoted Ito as saying that this was only a "fact-finding mission."

"However, he and his delegation repeatedly stated how very pleased they were with the friendly nature of the Tinian Chamorros and thanked Mayor Dela Cruz for the warm hospitality," he said.

The Tinian mayor said he was very excited about the possibility of Japanese military personnel training on Tinian.

"The Americans and the Japanese fought fiercely on Tinian 68 years ago. We were bitter enemies," he said in a statement. "Now we are the strongest of allies. It would be historic and heartwarming to see American Marines and Japanese soldiers training side-by-side on Tinian today."

Tinian was the launching pad for the two atomic bombs that the U.S. dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, hastening the end of World War II.

Dela Cruz's office said there was no discussion of the rumored "co-financing" of a military facility on Tinian.

"Mr. Ito stated that there is no existing plan for activities on Tinian. However, Colonel Loynd did state that the Marine Corps is working diligently on creating a new plan for Tinian in accordance with demands from Washington, D.C., and that they would very much enjoy training with the Japanese Self-Defense team on Tinian," the mayor's office said.

Japanese media, particularly *Yomiuri Shimbun*, has been reporting that a total of 8,600 U.S. Marines are set to be relocated abroad from Okinawa.

Quoting unnamed sources, the news agency said that Tokyo and Washington also agreed that Japan's financial assistance for the relocation, which has been the focus of attention in Japan, will include construction costs for training sites on Tinian and Pagan in the CNMI where the two governments plan joint defense drills.

The agreements, Japanese media said, were confirmed by foreign and defense officials from both countries at a vice ministerial meeting Thursday.

According to the agreement, Japanese media said, as the U.S. relocation has been scaled down, the total relocation cost to Guam will be lowered from the $10.27 billion agreed upon in 2006 to $8.7 billion.

Japanese media said that because Japan will cover the cost of building training sites on Tinian and Pagan, construction costs for Guam facilities will also be lowered from the amount decided upon in the 2006 agreement.

CNMI officials said they have yet to receive official communication about this.

POLICE

From Page 1

decided to walk across to the American Memorial Park. After walking for a while, the two sat on a parking stall to rest. As they were talking, Orbita allegedly fell on his back and appeared to be having a seizure.

Police said the symptoms described were consistent with cardiac arrest.

Orbita's friends and co-workers could not believe that the steelman died of cardiac arrest as he was known for being energetic and muscular.

"He's a happy guy and kind," one co-worker said.

One co-worker urged DPS to investigate the case thoroughly as Orbita allegedly recently received a death threat over a woman. The co-worker refused to elaborate.

RNV Construction had just hired Orbita a few months ago. His CW permit is still being processed.

JOINT

From Page 1

CHC doctors and other medical personnel.

Sen. Ralph Torres (R-Saipan), co-chair and spokesperson of the six-member Conference Committee on House Bill 17-278, said yesterday that the Senate had earlier agreed to help CHC but through a different method.

Torres, chairman of the Senate Committee on Health, said the final details of the line credit will be between CHC and MPLT.

"The joint conference committee agreed to secure future interest from MPLT to assist CHC so they can continue in providing healthcare for the CNMI," he said.

House floor leader George Camacho (Ind-Saipan), when asked for comment, said the House is poised to pass the compromise version of HB 17-278 today.

Torres, for his part, said the Senate will pass it also today.

Rep. Frank Dela Cruz (R-Saipan) said he is leaning towards supporting the compromise bill because CHC is in turmoil and needs immediate infusion of cash. As of yesterday, he had yet to read the conference committee bill.

If the House and Senate approve the bill today, it will be on its way to Gov. Benigno R. Fitial for action.

On Friday, Fitial again declared a state of emergency for CHC, allowing for both the reprogramming of funds to prevent a hospital shutdown and for the corporation to continue to contract with International Consulting Services LLC for medical billing services without going through standard procurement rules.

Tinian, Rota health centers next target of emergency layoffs

By MONETH G. DEPOSA
moneth_deposa@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

The emergency workforce reduction being enforced at the Commonwealth Healthcare Corp. has its sight on its next target: the Tinian and Rota health centers.

Based on initial estimates, this will save the cash-strapped organization some $2 million to $3 million each year, according to chief executive officer Juan N. Babauta.

The reduction-in-force has already resulted in the layoff of 19 personnel at the Community Guidance Center and more employees are expected to suffer the same fate.

On Saturday, Babauta submitted to the corporation's board a list of more employees that will be placed on the chopping block. The board approved the issuance of termination notices beginning this week.

Saipan Tribune learned that 24 personnel—12 each from the Rota and Tinian health centers—will be issued pink slips. Babauta said most of these employees are support staff such as maintenance workers and custodians. He cited duplication of services among the reasons for the termination of their services.

The list was finalized in consultation with the resident directors of the two centers: Freddy Hofschneider for Tinian and Edward Maratita for Rota. The names of those affected were withheld during Saturday's meeting.

Babauta said he also consulted and reviewed the list with hospital administrator Karen Buettner, nursing director Leticia Reyes, and board chair Joaquin Torres.

After Tinian and Rota, the reduction-in-force will continue on Saipan, according to the Babauta, but he could not immediately say how many will be affected this time.

He stressed the need to implement the layoffs to achieve a balance in the corporation's budget. "And we are not even close to that."

The corporation's goal is to reduce personnel by at least 30 percent. Each month, personnel cost amounts to $1.7 million for almost 600 employees on three islands.

While the list was being discussed Saturday, Tinian board member Anthony Aguon opposed the plan for Tinian, citing the need to first conduct a desk audit. Babauta pointed out that desk audit will take time to complete and would only delay the immediate actions that need to be enforced.

Aguon's opposition was defeated by a 3-1 vote. The three members who supported the motion were board chair Torres, Pedro Dela Cruz, and Roy Rios. As an advisory council, the board can only make recommendations to the CEO, who has the final say.

According to Dela Cruz, all affected personnel will be placed on the corporation's "priority list" once it starts hiring again. "As much as we don't like to see this, it's a tough decision that has to be implemented," he added.

Torres stressed the importance of laying off some employees as the corporation is not capable of keeping all of them with its "very uncertain" budget condition. "We cannot allow people to work without getting paid. This [emergency reduction-in-force] has been communicated since the beginning with the staff so they knew it's coming down," said Torres.

Dr. Jeremy Richards, director for Medical Affairs, appealed to Babauta to provide the affected employees enough time to prepare for their departure. He pointed out that during the first workforce reduction, many of the affected staff were taken by surprise and were not prepared.

Richards said that what happened was drastic and painful to those who lost their jobs. He said that if these individuals were given a longer notice, the department could seek some grants to support their positions.

According to Babauta, the Community Guidance Center was directly notified as early as November last year about the pending reorganization.

Fitial names Fund, CDA appointees

»Senate to tackle Igisomar's reappointment to Fund today

Gov. Benigno R. Fitial re-nominated Edward C. Sablan to the Commonwealth Development Authority board and nominated Juan S. Torres to serve on the NMI Retirement Fund board. This comes in the wake of a Senate committee's contentious recommendation to reject the re-appointment of former Fund board chair Sixto K. Igisomar.

Sablan and Torres' re-appointment and appointment require the advice and consent of the Senate.

The Senate has a session scheduled for today, and one of the items on the agenda includes the Senate Committee on Executive Appointments and Governmental Investigation's report on Igisomar's re-appointment to the Fund board.

If confirmed, Torres will serve the unexpired term of Francisco P. Rosario, which will expire on May 7, 2015.

The panel withdrew the report last week after a lengthy and heated debate on its recommendation to reject Igisomar on the eve of a surprising filing of Chapter 11 bankruptcy by the Fund.

Sablan, if confirmed, will serve another four-year term on the CDA board. That term will expire on April 26, 2016.

Fitial said he and the lieutenant governor are confident that Torres and Sablan are qualified and will continue to devote their time to the boards in which they are appointed or reappointed.

The two are asked to provide copies of their resume, statement of financial interest, police records, drug test receipt, and drug test result as soon as they become available. ***(Haidee V. Eugenio)***

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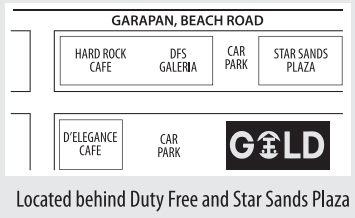

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DES students harvest first crops from Learning Garden program

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The Young Farmers of Dandan Elementary (clockwise from bottom left) Lyle Andrew, Kaile Miones, Akari Miones, Ronaley Arriola, Richelle Ramon, Mr. John Ulrich, Raymon Illo, Tonton Cabrera, Joseph Cabrera, April Chipwelong, PJ Litulumar, Brandon Itibus, Wensin Namelo, Harlan Ilo, Alani Miones, and Britney Espinosa celebrate their harvest from "Learning Garden" by having a "Salsa Party." The students made the salsa with fresh vegetables from the garden.

By CLARISSA V. DAVID
clarissa_david@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Since the launch of the "Learning Garden" initiative in Dandan Elementary School in February, students have planted tomatoes, corn, onions, okra, and pineapple in their three small plots.

Now, the young learners who are members of the school's Young Farmers Club are enjoying the fruits of their labor, celebrating their first harvest by making salsa using fresh vegetables from their own garden.

Fourth grade teacher John Ulrich said he meets the students weekly to educate them about the science and art of horticulture. These students tend to the garden daily with the assistance of parent volunteers, according to Ulrich.

"I have been very impressed with the students' desire to learn and to take care of the garden," said Ulrich, who is also the Young Farmers Club coordinator.

Dandan Elementary School was the first of the three pilot schools to be introduced to Tan Holdings' Learning Garden initiative, patterned after school learning gardens in the U.S. mainland. The project involves public and private organizations partnering with schools and communities to create gardens that would teach students how to grow their own crops, nurture healthy lifestyles, and take an active part in nature conservation and environmental stewardship.

Learning Garden was made possible with the support of the Public School System, the Northern Marianas College – Cooperative Research Extension and Education Service, Mariana Islands Nature Alliance, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

In the coming days, the students plan to take a field trip to local vendors along Dandan Road to sell bags of tomatoes and learn about the business aspect of farming.

Through the field trip, Ulrich said the students will have "real world experience" selling their products while learning about marketing and supply and demand, among others. "By having the students solicit these vendors they will learn lifelong skills that they can apply in real life situations throughout their life."

Ulrich expressed hope that they will have a larger garden in the future and that the program will expand to include green energy projects such as a rain garden, solar and wind energy alternatives, rain catchment, and purification systems.

COMMUNITY BRIEFS

DPW update on cross island project

The Department of Public Works wishes to inform the public that the cross islands road improvement project, phase II-A, which begins near the entrance to Santos Acres in San Vicente and ends after the Kagman intersection, is substantially complete. The remaining major item of work consists of the programming of the newly installed traffic signal along the Kagman or Cross Island Rd. (Isa Drive) intersection and other miscellaneous minor works such as completion of striping and road signage installation.

The Kagman traffic signal system at the intersection will be fully operational by Thursday, May 3. At this time, the public is advised to drive carefully and observe the temporary traffic control signs while approaching or exiting the intersection. ***(DPW)***

Public invited to NMC CREES Open House on May 4

The Northern Marianas College Cooperative Research Extension and Education, popularly known as NMC-CREES, is cordially inviting all stakeholders, officials, and the public to its Open House on Friday, May 4, 2012, from 9am to 2pm at the NMC campus in As Terlaje.

NMC-CREES is offering two workshops (Crop Improvement Program and EFNEP) in Room D-1. Concurrently, the other programs will be featuring interactive displays and presentations on Aquaponics, Tilapia Hatchery, homemade pesticides, new ideas for Value Added Food, Fruit Carving, home sewn dresses, and much more.

The public is invited to view firsthand the day-to-day work of all CREES staff during this entertaining and educating event. After visiting the CREES Open House, attendees are encouraged to head over to the Charter Day festivities, which begin at 4pm at the NMC South Field (next to NMC Gym). ***(NMC)***

Search for unexploded WWII ordnance

During World War II when the U.S military was bombarding the island of Saipan, an estimated one out of 10 shells fired did not explode. Therefore, there are potentially thousands of unexploded projectiles and, while some reached land, others are underwater. Do you know anyone you know has information regarding WWII underwater unexploded ordnance, UXO? If you have any information regarding potential submerged UXO, attend the community outreach meetings. You may also send information to uxoinfo@aol.com, text (671) 685-0142 or by calling and leaving a message for Samuel McPhetres at 234-5498 Ext. 1204.

■ Saipan: April 27, 6:30pm at the mayor's office conference room

■ Tinian: April 25, 6:30pm at Tinian Elementary School cafeteria

■ Rota: April 30, 6:30pm at the Round House.

All information must be submitted before May 4, 2012. ***(PR)***

Mafnas allegedly used donated shirt to wipe his desk

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
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REPORTER

On-leave Department of Public Safety Commissioner Ramon C. Mafnas allegedly wiped his desk using a Guam Boating Safety shirt in front of the Guam police official who had just presented him with the shirt.

DPS Captain Pedro Leon Guerrero stated in his interview with Office of the Attorney General chief investigator Vicente Babauta that the incident was "a total embarrassment" for the department.

Babauta's notes that contain Leon Guerrero's interview were among the several exhibits included in the OAG's report concerning many allegations of misconduct against Mafnas,

Leon Guerrero spearheaded a petition signed by over 140 DPS personnel that seeks the removal of Mafnas as DPS commissioner.

According to Leon Guerrero, a Police Captain Chargualaf from the Guam Police Department had gone to DPS for a meeting with Mafnas and some DPS personnel.

Capt. Chargualaf expressed his intent to donate a boat and four-stroke jet skis to Rota but that he wanted to consult with Mafnas first.

Mafnas suggested to the Guam police official to ship the boat and the jet skis first to Saipan then he (commissioner) would ship them to Rota.

Capt. Chargualaf explained that it will be easier and cheaper to just drive the boat and the jetskis from Guam to Rota.

Leon Guerrero said that Mafnas turned to Sgt. Bernard Santos and asked how many strokes the DPS jetskis have. Sgt. Santos allegedly made the mistake of replying that the jetskis have two strokes.

Leon Guerrero said that Mafnas told Santos that he is dumb as he doesn't know what to buy.

"Everybody in the room was shock and in total silence," Leon Guerrero said.

At the end of the meeting, Capt. Chargualaf presented Mafnas with a Guam Boating Safety shirt. Leon Guerrero said that right after the meeting was adjourned, Mafnas grabbed the shirt and started wiping his desk with it.

"Everybody was just staring at him [Mafnas], until I told him that, sir, he's [Chargualaf] still here and he could see you, then he [Mafnas] stopped," Leon Guerrero said.

The OAG report concluded that this incident with a Guam police official is an interpersonal standards of conduct issue. The OAG did not indicate the basis for reaching the finding besides stating that a finding of an interpersonal issue suggests follow up and possible training needs.

The OAG explained that law enforcement work requires a high level of professionalism and self-control.

The OAG said that a finding of an "interpersonal issue" suggests that a conflict exists, but the nature of the conflict did not adversely affect DPS operations and did not constitute a violation of policy or law.

The OAG found, among other things, that Mafnas violated investigative standards and interpersonal standards of conduct but cleared him of any violation of law.

Attorney General Edward T. Buckingham, chief prosecutor Peter Prestley, and chief OAG investigator Babauta prepared the report upon Gov. Benigno R. Fitial's instruction to investigate the allegations against Mafnas.

Public comments sought on school meals

Students, what do you want to eat? Parents, what do you want your kids to eat? Now is your chance to be heard. Menus for the 2012-2013 school year are being planned, and public input is invited.

This year, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which funds the school meals programs, has implemented new healthy meal guidelines and PSS-Food and Nutrition Services welcomes the public's comments on how to create nutrition-balanced, culturally acceptable meals.

The Food and Nutrition Services provides meals for all Public School System schools, HeadStart, most private schools, and some daycares through contracted caterers using one nutrition- balanced menu.

This year, the USDA-funded school lunches must include a full three-fourths to one cup of vegetable at each meal to ensure it is nutrition-balanced and filling. PSS-FNS often finds that students are unfamiliar with the variety of vegetables it is serving at school. We'd like to know what vegetables are being served in healthy CNMI families to grow smart, strong children and teens at home. We especially welcome locally acceptable recipes or ideas that use

■ Red or orange vegetables like local pumpkin, carrots, tomato

■ Dark green vegetables—like Pechai or broccoli, and

■ Legumes like mung beans, lentils or pinto beans.

These are foods high in the nutrition that help prevent diseases like cancer and diabetes. (These are also USDA mandated vegetable categories.)

Next school year, more whole grains will be on the menu also. How are whole grains like brown rice, wheat bread, oatmeal, and whole grain noodles used in your home? FNS would like to know!

The new healthier menus also have limitations. The meals must be low in fat, low in salt and meet specific calorie levels. This eliminates many high fat and high salt foods like processed meat, deep fried foods, and foods soaked in soy sauce. We'd love to know what else you use for flavor in your foods? Donne sali? Herbs and spices?

Please send your healthy meal suggestions before to Dianne. esplin@cnmipss.org or call CNMI PSS Food and Nutrition Services at 664-3901 or 3902 and leave a message for Dianne. Please get your comments in by May 4, 2012.

For more information about what is included in a nutrition-balanced meal, see ChooseMyPlate.gov. For more information about the USDA's new healthy meals mandate, see http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Governance/Legislation/nutritionstandards.htm. ***(FNS)***

Sorensen is newest MMAC title sponsor

By CLARISSA V. DAVID
clarissa_david@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Sorensen Media Group Saipan has stepped up to the plate to support the 2012 Marianas March Against Cancer.

Representatives of the company that runs radio stations Power 99 and The KAT 97.9 and television station ABC7 met yesterday with MMAC public relations committee chair Christopher Concepcion, Commonwealth Cancer Association board member Maggie Camacho and program director Juan L. Babauta at their Garapan office to discuss plans to help promote the largest cancer fundraising event in the CNMI.

Tina Palacios, branch manager for Sorensen Media Group Saipan, said they are donating $5,000 worth of radio ads and in-studio interviews with MMAC committee members. Sorensen will also do on-site remote coverage, making the company a title sponsor for this year's event.

"But there is really no dollar value when it comes to supporting a cause like MMAC," Palacios told *Saipan Tribune*. "Lives are affected and there is no dollar value that can correspond to those lives."

Palacios noted that everybody in the community is affected by cancer "somewhere down the line," thus the need not just to raise awareness about this deadly disease.

"We shouldn't wait for MMAC to happen. The awareness should be out there all the time—constantly," she said.

Palacios lauded all those who initiated MMAC for having the "vision" 10 years ago to do a worthy cause for all those who have battled or are still battling cancer.

"Hopefully in the future, we won't have a lot of people fighting it, that we'll find a cure so we can celebrate more people who have fought cancer," she said.

Palacios said that Sorensen Media Group Saipan has been an MMAC supporter "for a long, long time." "As long as we're still around, we will always be a part of MMAC," she added.

CCA's Camacho thanked Sorensen Media Group for supporting anew the MMAC, which is slated for April 27 to 28 at the Hopwood Jr. High School field in Chalan Piao.

"We look forward to their continued involvement toward the eradication of cancer. Through their assistance, we hope to be raising more awareness through our programs so that the community would become more aware and know what steps to take in dealing with cancer," said Camacho.

MMAC *committee cites contributors*

By CLARISSA V. DAVID
clarissa_david@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

The 2012 Marianas March Against Cancer committee recognized a private firm and several government organizations for their contribution to the biggest cancer fundraising event in the CNMI.

Ledge Light Technology, Inc. recently donated $500 to the MMAC committee and "we extend our utmost thanks and appreciation for their support," said overall committee chair Catherine Attao-Toves.

The committee, Attao-Toves said, also thanked the Hopwood Jr. High School and the Public School System "for allowing us to use their field as well as one of their classrooms which our accounting committee will use to collect and compute financial results throughout the night."

The committee also acknowledged the Commonwealth Utilities Corp., and the Department of Public Safety for their assistance before, during, and after the MMAC event.

"Without the technical support we receive from the CUC, we would not have electrical power throughout the MMAC so we are grateful for their assistance," said Attao-Toves. "Furthermore, the safety and security provided by the DPS and EMS is equally appreciated. We acknowledge their service and we thank them for it."

MMAC, the signature fundraising activity of the Commonwealth Cancer Association, is slated for April 27 to 28, from 6pm to 6am at the Hopwood Jr. High School field in Chalan Piao.

CLARISSA V. DAVID

Sorensen Media Group Saipan representatives led by branch manager Tina Palacios, third left, join Commonwealth Cancer Association officials and 2012 Marianas March Against Cancer Committee members for a group photo outside Power 99 radio station in Garapan yesterday. The company that runs radio stations Power 99 and The KAT 97.9 and television station ABC7 is donating $5,000 worth of radio ads, in-studio interview, and on-site remote coverage for the event scheduled on April 27 to 28 at the Hopwood Jr. High School field.

Tinian High's Hofschneider joins scholars' society

Tinian High School senior Chloe D. Hofschneider has been selected for the prestigious National Society of High School Scholars.

Chloe is the daughter of Julian and Margarita Hofschneider. She is a graduating student at THS and was recently accepted to the University of California Davis College of Biological Sciences to pursue a major in biology and a minor in music.

"Upon receiving the invitation to join this prestigious society, I was shocked and at the same time very happy for this offer came as an unexpected surprise. I feel honored to be a part of this elite group of scholars," she told *Saipan Tribune*.

Hofschneider

The NSHSS recognizes top scholars and invites only those students who have achieved academic excellence.

Since her freshmen year, Chloe has been a member of the National Honor Society in her school. She is also actively involved in numerous school and community organizations such as Stallions Performing Arts Club, Inetnon Natibu Club, and Tinian High School's Junior Achievement program.

For four consecutive years, Hofschneider bagged the first place award for the female singer category at the annual Chamorro Language Competition held every year in Guam.

Chloe was also the first winner of the Chamorro competition and was a Department of the Interior scholarship winner for the Junior Statesmen of America Program in Stanford University in the summer of 2010.

Chloe was also a nominee for best plaintiff attorney for the 2011 Regional Mock Trial Competition and Superior Cadet award winner in Tinian High School's Stallion Battalion. The 17-year-old student was also recipient of the honorable mention for her poem "A Culture Never Lost" in the 8th Annual Valentine Sengabeau Poetry Contest this year. ***(Moneth Deposa)***

Guidelines for the proper use of pesticides

The Division of Environmental Quality wants the community to be mindful of health and safety regulations when applying pesticides at home, in the garden, or at your farm area.

A pesticide is any substance used to control pests. Pests may be target insects, vegetation, fungi, etc. Most control the pests by poisoning them. Unfortunately, pesticides can be poisonous to humans; some are very poisonous, or toxic, and may seriously injure or even kill humans. Others are relatively non-toxic.

Pesticides can irritate the skin, eyes, nose, or mouth. The most important thing to remember is that you should always use caution whenever you work with any pesticide! Be Informed and Be Diligent.

BE INFORMED.

■ The purpose of a pesticide is to kill specific pests, so read the label before you even purchase the product. The label is the law, and there is nothing funny about the oft-spoken opinion that "nobody reads the label". You wouldn't take a prescription without reading the directions carefully, and it is just as important to read the pesticide label thoroughly—you are legally obligated to read everything except the information about crops that you are not planning to treat.

■ The directions for use and the rest of the information are equally important. Review the signal word, precautionary statements, personal protective equipment requirements, reentry statements, emergency first aid measures, etc., as many times as necessary to fully understand them and ensure you are willing to follow them.

■ Do not deny it's a pesticide. "I don't use pesticides, I use….." Ant or rodent baits? Fertilizers that also control pests? Treated seed? Aerosols that control pests? Flea collars? Natural chemicals like sulfur and copper? If it contains a chemical that controls pests, use all appropriate stewardship practices and don't be complacent.

BE DILIGENT.

■ Prior to applying pesticides, you need to plan what to apply, when to apply, how to apply, and where to apply.

If you live in a residential area and you'll be applying pesticides in your garden or small farm plot, then you must inform your neighbors what time of day and where you will be applying. If they have children or small animals (pets), they must be informed so they can take precautionary actions to safeguard their care and area (i.e., keep windows closed).

■ Prior to applying, ensure you have all the required personal protective equipment (PPE) when handling the pesticide and during the pesticide application.

■ Prepare only the amount you need. Do not dispose of any excess by applying it to a registered crop or site, if possible.

■ Do take the weather into consideration. Do not apply any kind of pesticide when winds are moderate (greater than 8 mph), or rainfall is imminent. These conditions may decrease performance of the pesticide and/or move it off-target. You're compromising the health of yourself and your neighbor when pesticides are applied when wind is present and rain is about to fall. Drift management at the time of application is the legal responsibility of the applicator to minimize drift.

■ Focus on the application. A little more is not better. Increasing the rate beyond the maximum allowed on the label for the specific use has absolutely no advantages. The maximum residue level, or tolerance, is the legally enforceable maximum concentration of a pesticide residue that is allowed on an agricultural commodity at the point of market. Higher than labeled rates can also promote the development of resistance and will add cost.

DEQ cautions that there are health effects of pesticides, depending on the type of pesticide. Pesticides are designed to kill pests but many can also pose risks to people, thus, DEQ requests any person, including farm worker or homeowners to understand the various situations for applying pesticides and following cautionary statements.

Don't leave stewardship to your neighbors. Your actions do make a difference, and you can (and should) model the way for others, including your children as they reach adulthood and begin handling pesticides.

Sooner or later, many of us will choose to use pesticides. Please use them wisely. ***(DEQ)***

Hilux Truck Show at NMC's Charter Day

The Northern Marianas College along with Power 99 and Microl Toyota is inviting community members to sign up to participate in the CNMI's first ever Hilux Truck Show.

"NMC has had car shows before but this is the first time we're hosting a Hilux Truck Show," said L.J. Castro, program coordinator for the Office of Student Leadership and Activities. "We're inviting owners of Saipan's hottest low riders to come out and join in the fun."

Those interested in participating in the Hilux Truck Show must register before NMC Charter Day on May 4, 2012. There is a $20 registration fee. Showtime is between 5pm and 9pm.

Applications forms are available for download at www.nmcnet.edu, or can be picked up at the NMC Student Center in Building J. For more information, contact Castro at 234-5498 Ext. 1251/1253 or email luisjohnc@nmcnet.edu.

The NMC 2012 Charter Day Committee will be giving out the Best in Show Award to competitors at the end of the competition. The committee would also like to thank the sponsors for this event, Microl Toyota and Power 99.

NMC Charter Day is an annual celebration that commemorates the establishment of the College in 1981. It is one of the largest celebrations in the CNMI. This year's event will take place on May 4, 2012 from 4pm to 10pm at NMC As Terlaje campus.

For more information about NMC Charter Day competitions, entertainment or vendor information, visit www.nmcnet.edu. ***(NMC)***

Citrus production workshop to benefit local growers

In an effort to assist local producers in other areas of agriculture, the Northern Marianas College Cooperative Research Extension and Education Service has initiated a research project to improve the potential for citrus production in the CNMI.

"Pacific island communities have great potential for small-scale production of citrus varieties," said Lawrence Duponcheel, NMC-CREES extension agent. "However, there are some challenges with citrus production specific to our region and we're trying to find solutions to help local citrus producers overcome these challenges."

In the Pacific, there are certain pests and plant diseases that can negatively affect the lifespan of citrus trees and the quality of the fruit, resulting in decreased productive capacity. These include the Citrus Tristeza Virus and *Phytophthora*, which is a soil-borne fungus that causes gummosis.

The aim of NMC-CREES project is to improve citrus tree longevity, as well as fruit quality and quantity through the introduction and evaluation of disease-resistant commercial varieties of citrus rootstocks and cultivars. These varieties were developed and collected from Citrus Research Centers such as those in California and Florida.

NMC

NMC-CREES Extension Assistant Sam Palacios evaluates a citrus plant at the Citrus Experiment Station on Tinian.

"The results of this research project should be able to tell us what varieties are best suited to local growing conditions leading to better sustainability of this type of production, as well as better profitability," said Duponcheel.

In addition, NMC-CREES is inviting interested local producers, farmers, and individuals to attend a workshop to learn more about this project and citrus production on May 4, 2012, Friday, from 8am to 10am in Room D-1 at the NMC As Terlaje campus. Participants will also receive free grafted citrus trees while supplies last.

This research project is called "Field Evaluation of Commercial Citrus Rootstocks and Cultivars in the Northern Mariana Islands" and is funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Hatch and Smith-Lever programs.

For more information, contact NMC-CREES at 234-5498 Ext. 1707. ***(NMC)***

Flashback

A LOOK BACK AT PAST YEARS' HEADLINES

Apr. 25, 2000

Hearing set for PSS budget requirement

The House Committee on Education holds a public hearing today to gather comments on a legislative initiative that will require the government to set aside at least 25 percent of its annual budget for the operations of the Public School System. The town meeting is scheduled at the House chamber in Capitol Hill, starting at 3:00 p.m. Rep. Brigida Ichihara, committee chair, said the recommendations proposed at today's hearing will be used to support the measure offered by Rep. Thomas B. Pangelinan. Under the Constitution, the CNMI government is currently mandated to earmark at least 15 percent of its cash resources every year for PSS -- an amount that is not sufficient now in view of the education sector's growing population and mounting expenditures.

Teno wants more than environmental study

Expressing relief over efforts by both federal and local agencies to address the polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) contamination in Tanapag, Gov. Pedro P. Tenorio underscored the need to follow up on such measures to safeguard the health of village residents. The chief executive met yesterday morning with officials of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the CNMI Division of Environmental Quality to keep abreast with a risk assessment study to be undertaken in Tanapag. They told Mr. Tenorio that a group will be arriving on May 2 to collect samples of soil, water, root crops, fish, crabs and others from the area believed to be contaminated with the highly-toxic chemicals left behind by the U.S. military.

Apr. 25, 2001

Bank eyes interest in fed's housing program

If negotiations do not miscarry, the Northern Marianas Housing Corporation is expected to get additional funding assistance for its Rural Development projects from BankPacific. Housing Chair Juan S. Tenorio revealed that his agency and the banking institution have been talking for BankPacific's possible participation in the agency's several home mortgage programs. Mr. Tenorio added that with the way negotiations are shaping up, BankPacific appears to be interested in joining the US Department of Housing and Urban Development initiative.

Medical account for govt workers eyed

The Legislature is eyeing the installation of a measure that would give government employees flexible spending healthcare accounts to meet their and their dependents' medical needs. Rep. William S. Torres recently introduced the CNMI Public Employee Medical Care Savings Act of 2001 which should allow health care expenses that are not included in the standard CNMI plan to qualify as pre-tax contribution. Mr. Torres pointed out that by establishing the medical savings account, the CNMI government can provide civil service workers a high deductible health plan which are not compensated for by an insurance.

Apr. 25, 2002

$2M for THS is merely repayment for Tinian

It is only right that Gov. Juan N. Babauta allocate the $2 million in Compact Impact money to Tinian since it was Tinian that put up the $24 million that started the Marianas Public Land Trust fund, which was then used to build housing units for emigrants from the Federated States of Micronesia. Senate Floor Leader Joaquin G. Adriano stressed this point, adding that the money used to construct the housing units on Garapan and Navy Hill for FSM emigrants came from the trust fund generated from the 1978 military leaseback on Tinian. "So, the $24 million that we got from the military leaseback established the MPLT fund, from which the money was then sourced to build these housing units," he said.

PCB soil treatment resumes

The treatment of PCB-laced soil in Tanapag has resumed since Saturday after getting a green light from the Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers said yesterday. Frank Ono, the Army Corps' on-island representative, said treatment operations resumed following the issuance of a conditional approval from the EPA. "They call it conditional approval because they're completing a risk assessment that they still have to finish," Ono said. "It just means 'not final'."

Island Snapshots

BUILDING TIES NMC

Acting Northern Marianas College president Barbra Merfalen, front row, sixth from left, and Saipan Mayor Donald Flores, eighth from left, pose for a group photo with visiting students, faculty, and staff from Hoseo University in South Korea. The representatives from Hoseo University visited NMC to explore the possibility of future educational and cultural exchanges between both institutions.

HERB GARDEN CLARISSA V. DAVID

Huang An Ning, Hyatt Regency Saipan landscaping manager, shows the hotel's herb garden, which grows herbs like Thai basil, lemongrass, lemon basil, spring onion, sweet basil, oregano, and hot pepper in a 600-sq.-ft. plot by the south wing of the hotel.

CAREER FAIR NMC

Northern Marianas College students meet a representative from the Pacific Islands Club at the recent NMC Career Fair facilitated by the College's Career Services program. The purpose of the event was to assist current and graduating NMC students find rewarding jobs and learn about different career opportunities. Students were able to meet with representatives from various businesses and organizations in the community at the event including the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, Marianas Islands Nature Alliance, Tan Holdings Corporation, Power 99, the U.S. Coast Guard and many more organizations.

COURTESY CALL CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Members of the Marianas High School's Aeronautic Dolphins have their picture taken with mentor John Raulerson, leftmost, PSS program coordinator Jeaniffer Cubangbang, second from right, and CNMI Delegate Gregorio Kilili C. Sablan, rightmost, during a courtesy call at the delegate's office in Washington. D.C. The Public School System's entry to the national Real World Design Challenge was bestowed the competition's "Against All Odds" aviation merit award.

BIRTHDAY SHOUTOUT

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Happy 4th birthday to Jeyanna DLC Crisostomo and may you have many more birthdays to come! Greetings come from Auntie Katie.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Happy first birthday to Susana, who celebrates her special day today, April 25. We love you and wish you many more blessings, health, and happy years from the Lord above. Shoutout coming from Mom and Dad.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Happy, happy 17th birthday to Loleen Grace Tomokane! We love and miss you so much! Greetings come from Grandma Lola, Grandpa, Eb, and family!

Opinion

Hafa Adai!
Saipan Tribune
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EDITORIAL

Enforcement-only approach worsens immigration problems

U.S. Rep. Zoe Lofgren, D-Calif., always has worked for comprehensive immigration reform. But at a House hearing Wednesday in Washington, she offered a particularly compelling argument against the enforcement-only approach some are promoting: It has actually made the nation's immigration problems worse.

Lofgren was speaking to the subcommittee on immigration about a proposal by Rep. Lamar Smith, R-Texas, to make the E-Verify system mandatory. Employers use E-Verify to check the legal status of job applicants, but as Lofgren explained, it simply does not work. In a Department of Homeland Security study, more than half of the undocumented workers checked by the system were verified as eligible to work here. Why? Because the way Congress created E-Verify left it open to fraud.

In 1986, Congress made it illegal to employ undocumented immigrants, requiring employers to ask for paperwork to verify their eligibility—and creating a booming market for fake Social Security cards.

Then, in 1996, Congress created E-Verify, which is supposed to accept only legitimate Social Security numbers. All that did was cause an explosion in identity theft. Making E-Verify mandatory would only worsen this problem.

Some employers rely on immigrant labor by choice, but many because they can't find citizens to do hard work on farms and the like. The availability of this work will continue to encourage people to cross the border and to remain here.

"Our system is fundamentally broken," Lofgren told her colleagues. "For decades, it has failed to provide legal pathways for American industries, like agriculture, to meet their labor needs. If we now tighten the enforcement screws yet again, without fixing the system, we are just going to drive a new and more pernicious form of fraud. That's the lesson we must heed from history."

Lofgren also worries that Smith's proposal would lead to more off-the-books employment. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that making E-Verify mandatory would cost $17.3 billion in lost tax revenue over 10 years, as more workers take to the underground economy.

The system could cost the federal government $1 billion to operate and small businesses $2.6 billion to use. It would put farmers out of business.

And remember, it doesn't even work.

We're disappointed that President Barack Obama has failed to live up to his campaign promise to tackle immigration reform. He has barely pressed on even minimally controversial, business-friendly proposals, such as making it easier for the smartest students from overseas to remain here to start their careers.

Perhaps after this election, reform will be possible. In the meantime, the least Congress can do, as Lofgren says, is avoid making things worse with horrors like E-Verify.

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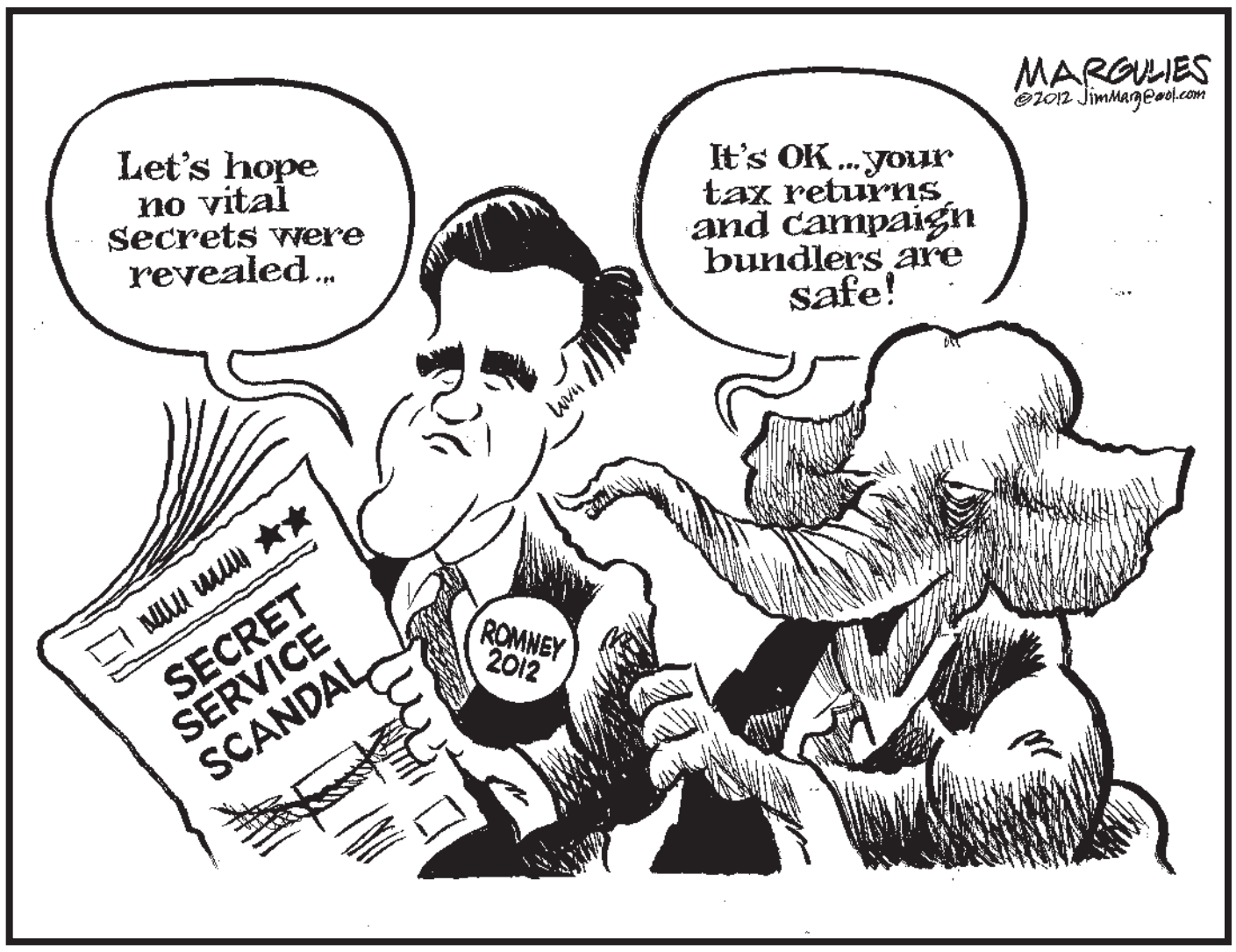
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Let's hope no vital secrets were revealed...
It's OK...your tax returns and campaign bundlers are safe!
SECRET SERVICE SCANDAL
ROMNEY 2012

A smaller, smarter military

By DOYLE MCMANUS
Los Angeles Times

Doyle McManus is a columnist for The Los Angeles Times*. Readers may send him e-mail at doyle.mcmanus@latimes.com.*

President Obama has called a halt to the decade-long rise in defense spending that began after Sept. 11, and has proposed shrinking the Army and Marine Corps by about 14 percent.

Congressional Republicans (not to mention Mitt Romney) say that would be disastrous and that it could jeopardize American troops abroad.

But the military brass has stood behind Obama—literally. When the president announced his proposals, the Joint Chiefs of Staff lined up behind him in the Pentagon's briefing room. There has been no audible dissent from the officer corps.

Last week I sat down with the chief of the service that's taking the deepest hits, Gen. Raymond T. Odierno of the Army, to try to see the budget issues from a soldier's perspective.

His take? He doesn't relish shrinking the Army he has served in since 1972, but he accepts the need for a cap on spending growth.

"In all the learning I've ever done since I was a cadet at West Point, one of the things I found out is that the underpinning of any strong society is its economic capability and its political system," he said.

"It's essential that we do play (a part) in helping to get our budget right, to get our economy moving, to ensure that we reduce spending. And that's what we're doing.

"Would I have rather seen the budget cuts a bit less? Probably," he said, suggesting that the Army might come back next year and ask for some spending to be restored.

The Army is slated to shrink by 80,000 troops, more than any other service. But Odierno points out that the Army also grew more than any other branch of the armed forces during the last decade. The proposed cuts would still leave the Army slightly larger than it was in 2001, with 490,000 active-duty troops.

"Some people say, well, the Army is the loser. In my mind I call it a rebalancing," he said. "We're now bringing our end strength back to where I think it needs to be. I feel comfortable with that."

Ask this bull-necked artillery officer what new initiatives get him excited, and he doesn't talk about new tanks or combat helicopters; in this budget, the Army isn't getting them.

Instead, he talks about a new doctoral program to train officers in strategic planning, and he talks about educating more officers to become experts on Asia and the Middle East, about "cultural awareness" and "the human domain."

One of the chief lessons he learned during his three combat tours in Iraq, Odierno said, is that the best-equipped army in the world can still lose a war if it doesn't understand the people it's fighting.

"There's so much we don't know," he said.

When Odierno first arrived in Iraq during the U.S. invasion in 2003, he thought his mission was straightforward: to hunt down Saddam Hussein and the remnants of his regime. He led his 4th Infantry Division in massive sweeps of the Sunni provinces north of Baghdad and captured thousands of prisoners, including Hussein.

But that overwhelming-force, take-many-prisoners style of campaign didn't lead to peace and democracy; instead, it helped stir up the insurgency against U.S. forces that exploded in 2004.

Odierno initially defended his muscular strategy, but he decided on reflection that he was wrong and that a more sophisticated form of counterinsurgency aimed at winning Iraqis' trust and allegiance would have been a far better approach.

In 2006, Odierno and other military leaders changed course, forming an alliance with former insurgents in Anbar province and launching a surge in Baghdad. These initiatives helped bring the war under control.

The important thing, he concluded, was "understanding the environment, understanding the fabric that's beneath a society"—knowledge he didn't have when he arrived in Iraq in 2003.

If Army officers know more about the countries where they fight, in other words, they can do counterinsurgency better, and with fewer troops.

"The more we understand the human domain, the less people it will take," he said.

Odierno's emphasis on regional expertise also informs the approach he thinks the Pentagon should take in Asia, as the Obama administration shifts the focus of foreign policy toward the Pacific, where the Navy has historically ruled.

"Seven out of 10 of the world's largest land armies are in Asia," he points out. "In every country, the predominant service is the army." If the United States wants to build relationships with Asian military establishments, the officers who will have the easiest time doing that will come from the U.S. Army, he says.

Up to now, history has remembered generals by the campaigns they fought. By that measure, Odierno has already made his mark through the successful surge in Iraq he helped orchestrate.

But ultimately, he may be remembered primarily for something less dramatic but more important: using the lessons of Iraq and Afghanistan to create a smaller but smarter force.

If he can pull that off, he'll deserve the oil portrait he's already guaranteed on the wall of the Pentagon's Army corridor.

EDITORIAL POLICY Letters to the editor must include the name, address, and contact number of the contributor. Letters that are critical in nature should focus on issues, not personalities. Contributions consisting of 500 words or less have more chances of getting published. The *Saipan Tribune* reserves the right to publish a contribution or not; the right to edit submissions for length, accuracy, and clarity; and the right to publish and distribute contributions in print, electronic, or other media formats. Submissions may be sent via snail mail to the 2nd Floor, JP Center, Beach Road, Garapan, Saipan, 96950; fax (670) 235-3740; e-mail to editor@saipantribune.com; or through our website at www.saipantribune.com.

The Great NMI Exodus

By JOHN DELROSARIO
Special to the Saipan Tribune

John DelRosario Jr. is a former publisher of the Saipan Tribune *and a former secretary of the Department of Public Lands.*

"The CNMI's the Lord's best moment," related a friend from afar. "It's the best place in the world to live in." Or at least it used to be. Ooops!

These isles enjoyed a reputation as an investment Mecca for investors who hailed from Nagoya, Seoul, and other economies of scale in Asia. It was a far-out paradise for young business hipsters who wanted to make it big, confident that the CNMI is the Florida of lion and tiger countries nearby. Indeed, we were blessed with the triad of sun, sea, and sand. But something went awry somewhere.

Today, the CNMI's fastest growing entity is government peddling as its biggest product is a bloated and overpaid bureaucracy. We love our fully nurtured *mañana* habit. Now, even the once happy reggae tune "Don't worry, be happy..." is muffled by piles of problems at home. It's no longer just sun, sea, and sand but also bankruptcy.

The deepening economic disaster at home has forced an exodus of more than 2,000 families. Relocation was a must where the setting is conducive to raising a family. Paradise has become their hellish hole. Most folks too have lost trust in their government, i.e., administration, Legislature, useless municipal governments, hospital, and the utilities corporation.

Foreign-owned businesses too have taken an exodus to the jetways of the CNMI, going home or elsewhere where they can find some safety net for return on investments. This continues as the horrendous cost of utilities force more business closures. This translates to far less jobs and wealth or revenues for these isles.

It is woefully unsettling. When would the dawn of hope shine once more on the archipelago I call home? Our government has become completely dysfunctional. But I'd heard around our livelihood may be pounded mercilessly by a cyclical shift in global economic deceleration and local leadership's negligence. I'd like to see what curtain would descend upon these isles.

The bad times taking quick turns for the worse, I recalled the wise words of an old saintly woman who said, "Traditional farming and fishing is our security, hope, and survival in both calm and storm." I probed her counsel to unravel whether she saw what was coming down the pike some 40 years ago. Definitely, the latter is here and we seem stuck in the filthy swamp of *mañana*. We simply have failed to employ foresight to organize our future.

Caveat: As soon as retirement benefits are reduced, disrupting payment of family obligations, we will see a steady and sturdy march toward chaos right here at home. When the last electronically transferred funds from the Fund to retirees' bank accounts, therein begins the real march for change, some of which would be preceded by unruly reactions. This is where leadership must stand up and explain how hard it has worked to save the Fund and other essential programs from going belly up.

Paradise is no longer the comfortable haven nor hope for our people. The dual exodus, locals and businesses, isn't helping a steadily sinking ship either. Well, "Let It Be." I'm lovin' it! It's mediocrity at its best. *A` Saina!*

■■■

Decibels of discontentment

For the most part, I'd skip baptismal, Holy Communion, and confirmation parties to avoid listening to the bitter expressions spewing out of the mouths of folks around the table.

These expressions turn into bigotry when alcohol is part of the gathering. This is more the reason to skip the gathering if only to maintain some sense of sanity. I already know their sentiments that doesn't augur well with my serious dislike for redundancy.

Who are these folks? They're mostly retirees, each of whom has an opinion, legitimate they may be. I wasn't ready to play the unofficial referee of vicious discontent hailing from leadership's negligence to give the Fund some seed money. And they ignored this issue for some 32 long years.

The point is: The system (Fund) was poorly designed financially. In other words, it is unsustainable from the outset. Most of what it does efficiently is crank out checks bimonthly from funds secured from the general fund. In short, nothing is coming in to brace its operations.

The only thing we also remember as retirees is the flow of checks from the Fund. We smile and even boast that the Fund administrator would be miffed if he finds out we're working at another job. It must be the cargo cult mentality that money would rain from the skies for many moons to come. It's now headed into the dry season.

Other than the absence of seed funding, the blue and green boys saw fit to use Fund money in the millions to loan to the Judiciary and others. Nobody saw fit to quiz what happens when the loaning agency can't meet its monthly obligation to the Fund. We were content and happy campers for over three decades. Yep! It was "Don't worry, be happy..."

Came tidings that the Fund would be bankrupt sooner than expected. Am I worried? Nope! Uncle Ben said not to panic. And it is when he said, "Don't panic" that I find millions of reasons why I should be worried sick and panicky. I mean, has he found a foolproof source to pay off the administration's debt of over $300 million? Would his proposed solutions be lasting answers or temporary ones? In other words, would the Fund be self-sustaining over the long haul? Isn't this familiar paradigm another perfect recipe for disaster?

I'm just happy to avoid the bitter sentiment of governance on this issue. I'd gladly refer them to the blue and green boys who have ready answers to share with them. Now, I'm praying that candidates won't brave discussing this issue publicly. I'd take you guys by the horn and show you that governance isn't ready for anymore of your insanity and stupidity. Enough is enough!

■■■

A highly analytical and thoughtful scholar asked what's my prediction for this year's midterm election? Related that it's a bit too early to render an assessment until I see the entire slate of candidates. I know, however, that a good portion of governance would vote on the basis of policy. The wish list includes the economy, death of the Retirement Fund, lack of funds for the local hospital and public school system, among others. Hope candidates have an inkling of policy questions they need to answer forthwith. Or is this the group that is fearful of the virus of reason? Oooops! Sorry!

Letters to the Editor

Some questions for CUC

As a stakeholder in CUC's standing, I have several questions about its budget and perhaps it would shed some interesting discussions for the ratepayers. Such clarification is crucial and when laid out in layman's terms so that every ratepayer would have full satisfaction and understanding of the value of electric, water, and wastewater treatment services produced and delivered by CUC, subsequent rate increases could be agreeable to ratepayers pursuant with the numbers and appertaining assumptions that are sanctioned and justified by the management officials.

It is a fact that CUC is projecting a positive net operating income of $2.5 million for fiscal year 2013. This amount is reserved for debt service and other capital outlays of about $100,000. The power division is expected to have a net operating income of $4.9 million, the water division to break even, and a loss of $2.4 million for the wastewater division. A common cost (administration) in the amount of $6.8 million was allocated to the three divisions as follows: $3.95 million to the power division, $2.9 million to water, and $.93 million to wastewater. CUC is expecting to buy fuel products in the amount of $78.2 million for fiscal year 2013. In fiscal year 2012 CUC paid $65.2 million for fuel but only consumed a total of $63.2 of this total. A residual amount of $2.0 million was not explained.

The pivotal and most favored justification by the management is the EPA stipulated orders. Whatever this is, it seems that CUC is do or die on this, if such mandates are ignored. Where and how these mandates affect the ratepayers—it is only coming from a monolithic source and without analysis and scrutiny by a ratepayer—we can only rely on what was selectively reported by CUC. As a ratepayer, do I have an interest in this ruling by EPA? You can give that more than a 100 percent affirmative.

I look forward for CUC's answers to the following questions:

1. Are there any non-operating incomes, or non-operating expenses that we should know about that would have some financial effects on the fiscal year 2013 operating income?

2. Is there any particular reason why the water division is expected to break even?

3. Is there any particular or specific assumption and explanation why the wastewater division is targeted for loss position?

4. CUC aggregates or bundles all the revenue and cost centers for all the three islands. Is CUC in a position to separate the business concerns of each of the islands so that the ratepayers would have a clear understanding what the true operating income and operating expenses are pertaining to a specific island business unit or center?

5. What are the basis for the cost allocation of the administration cost to the power, water, and wastewater divisions?

6. What is the debt service and cost outlays? Is this a reserve fund? Can the ratepayers see specific historical data on this for the last five years?

7. The $78.1 million fuel estimate, can CUC produce in layman's term how this amount is shared by all ratepayers? Is this projection consistent for the next year and each year that follows up to a five-year period?

These are just preliminary questions for now. I would suspect that more questions would follow. In the meantime, we would be able to piece together a right frame of mind as we examine the details of CUC's burden to the ratepayers that sustain its ongoing concern.

Francisco R. Agulto
Chalan Kanoa, Saipan

Cockamamie ideas

It never ceases to amaze me when I hear some of the cockamamie ideas some politicians propagate on the public. The latest of which is the consideration to lease one of the Northern Islands to Japanese corporation for the disposal of tsunami waste and debris! This absurd idea is being justified as a revenue source through a lease agreement with the Department of Public Lands.

We are assured that this waste would not contain radioactive, toxic, or hazardous materials, and this would be "certified safe" by the Japanese government. Well, all I can say is that if anyone actually gives credence to such a guarantee, then they have their heads in the sand. We are told that as there is no space in mainland Japan to store and dispose of this waste, other foreign locations (CNMI) are being considered. Surely the Japanese authorities have considered creating a large breakwater and backfilling this with the waste, and therefore creating more "space" in Japan.

Perhaps this study has already been completed and a verdict rendered that the resulting pollutants would be devastating to the ecological environs? I suspect that this is the real truth and this waste is being sold as broken furniture and household effects, not a real potential hazard, Yeah! The mere fact that this proposal is being credibly entertained by our government is devastating.

One can already see the headlines in the Japanese media, "Tsunami waste destined for the CNMI." Meanwhile we have our MVA spending millions on promoting the same CNMI as a pristine tourist destination, go figure! Prospective visitors, Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Russian or otherwise will not differentiate between an uninhabited Northern Isle, Saipan, Rota, or Tinian. All they will think is, "I'm not going to the CNMI." I wonder if our erstwhile politico has recently checked with the Three Mile Island Visitors Authority to see how tourism is doing there. Thank goodness we have the EPA who will doubtless put a stop to this nonsense.

Recently the U.S. Navy sank an abandoned ship which was part of the flotsam from the tsunami and was approaching the U.S. West Coast. That act alone should be indicative of what, God knows what, is contained in this waste. It is imperative that a stake be put through the heart of this proposal immediately and no further consideration or discussion be given to this proposal, no studies, no lease negotiations or meetings with the Japanese corporation. To do otherwise will attract unneeded publicity in the International media which for anyone with even a few firing neurons will realize is a no-win situation for the only remaining viable sector of the CNMI economy, our visitor industry. By the way, the definition of waste is precisely that, WASTE!

John White
Chalan Piao, Saipan

Satellite image and accompanying information are provided by the National Weather Service. For an updated weather forecast, visit the National Weather Service Guam Homepage: www.prh.noaa.gov/guam/

The Weather

5-Day Forecast for Saipan and Tinian

TODAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
Mostly cloudy with isolated showers. Light and variable winds.	Mostly cloudy with isolated showers. Light and variable winds.	Mostly cloudy with isolated showers.	Mostly cloudy with isolated showers.	Mostly cloudy with isolated showers.
▲87° ▼77°	▲87° ▼77°	▲87° ▼77°	▲87° ▼77°	▲87° ▼77°

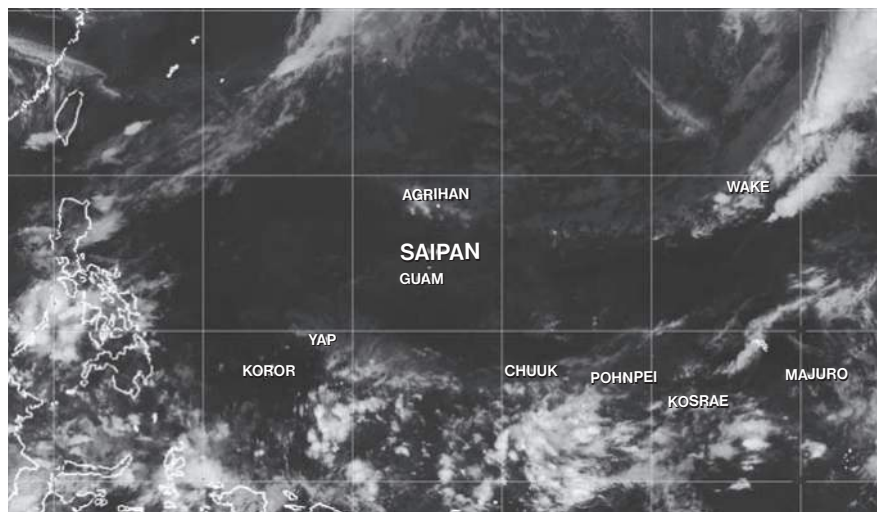
Micronesia

Guam and Rota	Thunderstorms	▲88	▼77
Palau	Thunderstorms	▲86	▼78
Yap	Showers	▲90	▼77
Chuuk	Showers	▲89	▼79
Pohnpei	Showers	▲86	▼78
Kosrae	Showers	▲86	▼78
Majuro	Showers	▲86	▼79

Around The Globe

Auckland	Partly Cloudy	▲69	▼58
Beijing	Windy	▲68	▼42
Hong Kong	Thundershowers	▲81	▼73
Honolulu	Showers	▲82	▼70
London	Rain	▲51	▼50
Los Angeles	Mostly Cloudy	▲69	▼56
Manila	Partly Cloudy	▲96	▼82
Melbourne	Rain	▲62	▼52
Miami	Sunny	▲78	▼57
New York	Partly Cloudy	▲58	▼44
Osaka	Cloudy	▲76	▼61
Paris	Rain	▲55	▼49
Pusan	Rain	▲64	▼56
Rome	Sunny	▲66	▼50
Salem	Partly Cloudy	▲66	▼53
San Francisco	Partly Cloudy	▲65	▼58
Seoul	Rain	▲63	▼47
Tokyo	Showers	▲69	▼57
Washington, DC	Partly Cloudy	▲62	▼46

Yesterday's Satellite Image



PICTURE TIME: 1:00PM, TUESDAY, APRIL 24, 2012

Western North Pacific between equator and 25N from 130E to 180.

A cold front extends southwestward from 25N138E to beyond 23N130E. Cloudiness and scattered showers are within 150 miles of the front. Another cold front curves southwestward from the date line at 21N180 to south of Wake Island at 15N167E then continues as a shear line westward to east of Saipan at 15N150E then turns northwestward to end near 17N139E. Scattered showers and a few thunderstorms east of Wake Island are east of 167E along and up to 150 miles northwest of the cold front. Cloudiness and patchy rain are along and up to 125 miles north of the shear line from 167E westward to 150E while scattered showers and a few thunderstorms are along and up to 200 miles northeast of the shear line to the west of 150E. A circulation centered southeast of Koror at 3N137E is drifting slowly westward. Scattered showers and isolated thunderstorms are south of a line from 5N130E to 8N138E to 6N146E to EQ149E. A surface trough south of Chuuk runs from 4N150E to 2N152E with scattered showers and a few thunderstorms within 80 miles of the trough. A trade-wind disturbance over Kosrae is producing scattered showers and isolated thunderstorms south of a line from 4N157E to 6N163E to 4N168E.

Tides

Saipan Harbor

5:12 AM	Today	Low Tide:	1.1 Feet
10:02 AM	Today	High Tide:	1.7 Feet
5:20 PM	Today	Low Tide:	0.1 Feet

Sunrise/Sunset

Today	5:57 AM	6:33 PM
Thursday	5:56 AM	6:34 PM
Friday	5:56 AM	6:34 PM
Saturday	5:55 AM	6:34 PM
Sunday	5:55 AM	6:34 PM

Moonrise/Moonset

Today	8:32 AM	9:47 PM
Thursday	9:22 AM	10:36 PM
Friday	10:13 AM	11:22 PM
Saturday	11:05 AM	
Saturday	11:57 AM	12:07 AM

Note: Blank spaces indicate that a rising or a setting did not occur during that 24-hour interval.

GET YOUR PICTURES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS PUBLISHED—FOR FREE

The *Saipan Tribune* accepts for FREE publication the following:

PICTURES

- ISLAND SNAPSHOTS
  Birthdays, baptisms, christenings, family gatherings, reunions, club activities, and other community-related events.
- BIRTHDAY GREETINGS
  A way for families and friends to greet their loved ones, accompanied by a picture of the person celebrating his/her birthday.
- BUSINESS
  Corporate donations, volunteer work, promotions, granting of awards, team-building exercises, meetings and other activities by members of the business community.
- SAMU'T SARI
  Pictures from the islands' Filipino community, primarily focusing on Filipino activities, gatherings, get-togethers, volunteer work, etc.
- TRAVELOGUE
  Pictures of off-island travels. Contributors may submit up to 10 pictures for consideration.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- COMMUNITY BRIEFS
  Announcements of upcoming activities of organizations, community clubs, government agencies, and private companies.
- CAMPUS BULLETIN
  Announcements of upcoming activities in public and private schools, as well as calendar of activities. May include PTSA meetings, enrollment procedures.

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For pictures:

- Photos should be original and not copyrighted. Contributors must have the right to allow the *Saipan Tribune* to publish the pictures.
- Digital pictures should be high-resolution (minimum of 800kb).
- Must have complete details (who, what, where, when), the name of contact person, and phone number.
- Photos must have been taken in the last two months.
- For birthday greetings, must be submitted no later than 12 noon of the previous day to make it to next day's edition.

For announcements:

- Must have complete details (who, what, where, when), the name of contact person, and a phone number.
- Must be submitted no later than 12 noon to make it to next day's edition.

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- Drop off: 2nd Floor, JP Center, Beach Road, Garapan, Saipan
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Anonymous tips can now be submitted through the following:

- Call 234-7272 (PARA) on any telephone
- *11 on any PTI cellular phone
- Log on to the internet at www.nmicrimestoppers.com

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FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF JANUARY 11, 2012

DEPARTURES

GUAM (GUM)-ROTA (ROP)			
C05062	2:10am	2:40am	1, 5
SAIPAN (SPN)-ROTA (ROP)			
C05064	4:15am	4:50am	1, 5
SAIPAN-GUAM (GUM)			
C05064	4:15am	5:45am	1, 5 via ROP
C05070	4:35am	5:25am	2, 3, 4, 6, 7
C05068	8:25am	9:15am	Daily
C05074	12:10pm	1:00pm	1, 4, 5, 7
C05076	3:10pm	4:00pm	1, 2, 4, 5, 7
C05078	6:50pm	7:40pm	1, 2, 4, 5, 7
C05078	7:00pm	7:50pm	3, 6
C05072	9:55pm	10:45pm	1, 2, 4, 5, 7
C05072	10:05pm	10:55pm	3, 6
SAIPAN-NARITA (NRT)			
DL287	6:00am	8:40am	Daily
DL285	6:35am	9:15am	1, 3, 5, 7
DL297	4:25pm	7:15pm	Daily
SAIPAN-OSAKA (KIX)			
OZ119	4:00am	6:40am	Daily
SAIPAN-SEOUL (ICN)			
OZ606	2:10am	6:00am	1
OZ606	2:40am	6:30am	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
OZ119	4:00am	11:20am	Daily via KIX
OZ604	3:20pm	7:10pm	Daily
SAIPAN-BUSAN (PUS)			
OZ608	3:35am	7:05am	4, 7
DL581	4:10am	7:30am	1, 5
SAIPAN-GUANZHOU (CAN)			
3U8646	4:20am	7:30am	2, 6
SAIPAN-SHANGHAI (PVG)			
3U8648	6:10am	8:40am	1, 4, 5, 7
SAIPAN-MANILA (MNL)			
OZ606/701	2:10am	11:15am	1 via ICN
OZ606/701	2:40am	11:15am	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 via ICN
C05070/191	4:35am	9:45am	3, 6 via GUM
DL287/173	6:00am	10:25pm	Daily via NRT
C05068/183	8:25am	9:25pm	2, 5 via GUM
C05068/183	8:25am	9:40pm	1, 3, 4, 6, 7 via GUM
C05076/183	3:10pm	9:25pm	2, 5 via GUM
C05076/183	3:10pm	9:40pm	1, 4, 7 via GUM
C05076/193	3:10pm	11:00pm	2, 5 via GUM-Palau
OZ604/703	3:20pm	11:00pm	Daily via ICN
C05072/PR111	9:55pm	7:50am+1	1, 5, 7 via GUM
C05072/PR111	10:05pm	7:50am+1	3, 6 via GUM
SAIPAN-HONG KONG (HKG)			
OZ606/721	2:10am	12:00pm	1 via ICN
OZ606/721	2:40am	12:00pm	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 via ICN
C05076/147	3:10pm	10:25pm	1, 5 via GUM
OZ604/723	3:20pm	10:30pm	Daily via ICN
OZ604/749	3:20pm	10:50pm	Daily via ICN

ARRIVALS

ROTA (ROP)-GUAM (GUM)			
C05064	5:15am	5:45am	1, 5
ROTA (ROP)-SAIPAN (SPN)			
C05062	3:10am	3:45am	1, 5
GUAM (GUM)-SAIPAN			
C05062	2:10am	3:45am	1, 5 via ROP
C05069	2:45am	3:35am	2, 3, 4, 6, 7
C05071	7:00am	7:50am	Daily
C05073	10:05am	10:55am	1, 2, 4, 5, 7
C05075	1:40pm	2:30pm	1, 4, 5, 7
C05077	5:30pm	6:20pm	1, 2, 4, 5, 7
C05077	5:40pm	6:30pm	3, 6
C05079	8:35pm	9:25pm	1, 2, 4, 5, 7
C05079	8:45pm	9:35pm	3, 6
NARITA (NRT)-SAIPAN			
DL298	10:25am	3:00pm	Daily
DL288	8:40pm	1:15am+1	Daily
DL286	7:40pm	12:20am+1	2, 4, 6, 7
OSAKA (KIX)-SAIPAN			
OZ120	9:50pm	2:20am+1	Daily
SEOUL (ICN)-SAIPAN			
OZ603	9:00am	2:20pm	Daily
OZ120	7:10pm	2:20am+1	Daily via KIX
OZ605	7:40pm	1:00am+1	7
OZ605	8:10pm	1:30am+1	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
BUSAN (PUS)-SAIPAN			
OZ607	9:00pm	2:20am+1	3, 6
DL580	10:10pm	2:55am+1	4, 7
GUANZHOU (CAN)-SAIPAN			
3U8645	7:40pm	3:00am+1	1, 5
SHANGHAI (PVG)-SAIPAN			
3U8647	10:40pm	5:00am+1	3, 4, 6, 7
MANILA (MNL)-SAIPAN			
DL172/288	8:00am	1:15am+1	Daily via NRT
C0190/5077	10:55am	6:30pm	3, 6 via GUM
C0190/5079	10:55am	9:35pm	3, 6 via GUM
OZ702/605	12:30pm	1:00am+1	7 via ICN
OZ702/605	12:30pm	1:30am+1	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 via ICN
PR110/C05071	10:15pm	7:50am+1	1, 3, 5, 6, 7 via GUM
C0192/5071	10:25pm	7:50am+1	2, 5 via GUM-Palau
C0184/5071	11:10pm	7:50am+1	1, 3, 4, 6, 7 via GUM
OZ704/603	11:40pm	2:20pm	Daily via ICN
C0184/5071	11:59pm	7:50am+1	2, 5 via GUM
HONG KONG (HKG)-SAIPAN			
OZ724/603	12:30am	2:20pm	Daily via ICN
OZ750/603	1:00am	2:20pm	Daily via ICN
OZ722/605	1:15pm	1:00am+1	7 via ICN
OZ722/605	1:15pm	1:30am+1	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 via ICN
C0180/5071	11:15pm	7:50am+1	1, 5 via GUM

LEGEND: Days: Monday (1), Tuesday (2), Wednesday (3), Thursday (4), Friday (5), Saturday (6) and Sunday (7); 5K: FlyGuam; 3U: Sichuan Airlines; CZ: China Southern; CO: Continental; DL: Delta Airlines; OZ: Asiana

ETD: Estimated Time of Departure; ETA: Estimated Time of Arrival. The *Saipan Tribune* is not responsible for any changes in the schedule.)

FREEDOM AIR FLIGHT SCHEDULE

Airline	ETD	ETA	Frequency
Guam–Rota			
FRE 100	7:30	8:00	Daily
Rota–Saipan			
FRE 100	8:20	8:50	Daily
Guam–Rota			
FRE 300	17:00	17:30	Daily
Rota–Saipan	17:50	18:20	Daily
Saipan–Rota			
FRE 200	9:30	10:00	Daily
Rota–Guam	10:20	10:45	Daily
Saipan–Rota			
FRE 400	18:55	19:25	Daily
Rota–Guam			
FRE 400	19:40	20:10	Daily
Saipan–Tinian			
FRE 101	6:45	6:55	Daily
FRE 103	7:30	7:40	Daily
FRE 105	8:00	8:10	Daily
FRE 107	8:40	8:50	Daily
FRE 109	9:10	9:20	Daily
FRE 111	10:45	10:55	Daily

Airline	ETD	ETA	Frequency
FRE 115	13:00	13:10	Daily
FRE 117	14:30	14:40	Daily
FRE 119	16:00	16:10	Daily
FRE 121	16:40	16:50	Daily
FRE 123	17:40	17:50	Daily
FRE 125	18:30	18:40	Daily
Tinian–Saipan			
FRE 102	7:05	7:15	Daily
FRE 104	7:50	8:00	Daily
FRE 106	8:20	8:30	Daily
FRE 108	9:00	9:10	Daily
FRE 110	10:00	10:10	Daily
FRE 112	11:05	11:15	Daily
FRE 114	12:00	12:10	Daily
FRE 116	13:30	13:40	Daily
FRE 118	14:50	15:00	Daily
FRE 120	16:20	16:30	Daily
FRE 122	17:00	17:10	Daily
FRE 124	18:05	18:15	Daily
FRE 126	18:50	19:00	Daily

Business

Apple's squeeze hits phone companies, competitors

NEW YORK (AP)—Apple is set to report another record quarterly profit on Tuesday, continuing the relentless string of results that's made it the world's most valuable company. Those profits don't come out of thin air: A range of businesses—from the company's wireless carrier friends to its PC-making foes—are seeing their profits melt away and flow to Apple's bottom line.

Apple's success is good for the U.S. economy, and some businesses, like software developers and memory-chip makers, have benefited from the disruption Apple is causing. But its enormous gains have resulted in others' pains, sometimes in unexpected places.

■ AT&T Inc., for instance, took a chance on Apple's unproven phone in 2007, but the company might be regretting that decision. Since it became the first U.S. phone company to carry the iPhone, its stock is down 25 percent. Apple's is up 415 percent.

■ Best Buy has sold Apple products off and on since the late 1990s, but analysts now see Apple as a major threat to the U.S.'s only remaining national big-box electronics chain.

■ Worst off, of course, are rival phone makers. Apple has just 8 percent of the global phone market, but makes about 80 percent of the industry's operating profits.

Wall Street analysts expect Apple Inc. to post a profit of $9.2 billion for the January to March quarter when it reports on Tuesday. That's roughly in line with the profit expected from the world's largest oil company, Exxon Mobil Corp.

The majority of the profit will come from iPhone sales, especially now that three of the four national U.S. wireless carriers —AT&T, Sprint, and Verizon— sell the phone.

But, for a phone company, selling an iPhone is a bit of a gamble. The company pays Apple an average of $659 for iPhones and then sells them to consumers for between $50 and $200.

The phone companies count on making their money back, and more, in monthly service fees over the life of a two-year contract. Each iPhone comes with a data plan that adds at least $30 to a consumer's monthly bill. At AT&T, the average iPhone user pays more than $100 per month.

It turns out, however, that some of the added income wireless carriers get from data plans is just compensating for a drop in what they're able to charge for calling minutes. The money is also eaten up by the cost of network upgrades to support all the data traffic—the emails, photos and YouTube videos iPhone users consume.

AP

In this Friday, April 20, 2012, file photo, Baek Sung-min, 23, jumps in joy after purchasing a new iPad tablet computer at an Apple store in Seoul, South Korea.

"The primary beneficiary of the growth in wireless data has been one company—Apple," says William Power, an analyst with R.W. Baird & Co.

Despite the smartphone boom created by Apple's iPhone, "free cash flow," or the cash left over every quarter after expenses and capital spending, hasn't grown at the major U.S. wireless companies since 2007, according to Power's calculations.

In the same period, Apple's free cash flow has grown more than sixfold, to over $40 billion last year.

There are signs that U.S. phone companies are starting to take countermeasures. Apple's stock has fallen 11 percent from its all-time high, in part because investors think the phone companies might start demanding lower prices from Apple or making it harder for consumers to buy iPhones at heavily discounted prices.

Already, the phone companies have tightened their phone upgrade policies, meaning existing subscribers have to wait longer before they're eligible for a new $200 iPhone, and raised or introduced phone upgrade fees, which now range from $18 to $36. They promote cheaper phones running Google Inc.'s Android software and more recently, Windows phones.

However, the phone companies may have limited leverage to change the economics of the iPhone.

AT&T, Sprint and Verizon are in a hotly competitive race. Each one is afraid to tighten policies or raise prices too much, lest subscribers jump to a competitor.

When Verizon started selling the iPhone last year, AT&T's CEO vowed to push Android phones because they're not as expensive to subsidize. But the company ended up selling more iPhones than ever.

Sprint Nextel Corp., the last of the big carriers to get the iPhone, is in a precarious financial position after many years of losses. Sanford Bernstein analyst Craig Moffett thinks there's a risk that the cost of selling the iPhone could push Sprint into bankruptcy.

Another partner struggling to deal with Apple's success is Best Buy Inc., the largest consumer electronics retailer in the U.S.

"While Best Buy has enjoyed strong sales with Apple products, Apple has benefited more," Daniel Binder, an analyst with Jefferies & Co., wrote last month.

Apple's own stores compete with Best Buy, and as Apple products win out over others, consumers become more likely to shop at Apple stores. Binder downgraded Best Buy a year and a half ago, saying the iPad would cut into PC sales. That trend has been even stronger than he expected, he says.

Europe's debt fix falters, rattling markets

FRANKFURT, Germany (AP)—Europe's plan to fix its debt crisis by imposing budget cuts frayed Monday. Heavy selling rocked financial markets, uncertainty gripped two governments, and the economic outlook darkened across the continent.

The German stock market suffered its worst day in six weeks. In the United States, the Dow Jones industrial average lost more than 100 points.

Across Europe, the debt crisis appeared at its most perilous point since December, when most of the continent united behind a plan to place strict caps on government spending, a strategy known as austerity, and the European Central Bank made the first of two infusions of cheap credit into the banking system. New governments in Spain and Italy got to work on improving growth.

Now the first pillar of Europe's approach—austerity—is faltering.

"Europe has not solved its problems, and the austerity programs are making things worse, not better," said Peter Morici, an economist at the University of Maryland.

Cutting government spending can weaken an economy and result in less tax revenue flowing back to the government. So the goal of cutting the deficit can backfire and make it grow.

And even if a country is reducing its deficit, it still has one, which means the debt is increasing. The European Union said Monday that governments did cut their budget deficits in 2011, but government debt nonetheless rose as a percentage of economic output.

Meanwhile, developments across the continent cast doubt on public support for Europe's austerity prescription: government layoffs and wage reductions, spending cuts on government programs and higher taxes.

BUSINESS BRIEFS

Microsoft sells AOL patents on to Facebook

NEW YORK (AP)—Microsoft, which just bought patents from AOL for $1 billion, is now turning around and selling most of them to Facebook for $550 million. Facebook is buying about 650 of the 925 AOL patents and patent applications that Microsoft bought, Microsoft and Facebook said Monday. Facebook will also get a license to use the rest of the AOL Inc. patents that Microsoft bought. Similarly, Microsoft Corp. will get a license to use the patents Facebook is buying. This part of the arrangement amounts to an agreement between Facebook and Microsoft not to sue each other over any of the AOL patents. The companies are not saying what the patents cover.

Wal-Mart faces big fines amid bribery charges

NEW YORK (AP)—Allegations that Wal-Mart Stores Inc. covered up the findings of an internal probe that proved its Mexican subsidiary bribed officials in that country could have huge implications for the world's biggest retailer and its executives. The alleged bribery scheme was revealed by *The New York Times*, which reported that Wal-Mart failed to notify law enforcement after the company's investigators found evidence of millions of dollars in bribes given to Mexican officials in exchange for getting building permits faster and other favors to help it aggressively expand in the region. Two Democratic U.S. congressmen Elijah Cummings and Henry Waxman said on Monday that they were launching an investigation into the matter, and they sent a letter to CEO Mike Duke asking for a meeting. And The Washington Post reported late Monday that the U.S. Department of Justice has been conducting a criminal probe of the allegations since December, citing people familiar with the matter.

BOH reports net income of $43.8M in Q1

HONOLULU, HI—Bank of Hawaii Corporation (NYSE: BOH) yesterday reported diluted earnings per share of $0.95 for the first quarter of 2012, up from $0.85 in the previous quarter, and up from $0.88 in the same quarter last year.

Net income for the first quarter of 2012 was $43.8 million, an increase of $4.6 million or 11.7 percent compared to net income of $39.2 million in the fourth quarter of 2011, and up $1.5 million or 3.4 percent from net income of $42.4 million in the first quarter of 2011.

Loan and lease balances increased to $5.6 billion during the first quarter of 2012, up 1.1 percent compared to the end of the fourth quarter of 2011 and up 5.1 percent compared to the end of the same quarter last year. Deposit growth continued to remain strong, increasing to $10.6 billion at March 31, 2012. The allowance for loan and lease losses declined to $135.6 million and currently represents 2.42 percent of outstanding loans and leases.

"Bank of Hawaii Corporation had a good start in 2012 with solid performance in the first quarter," said Peter S. Ho, chairman, president, and CEO. "Loan balances continued to grow, deposits remained strong, and our net interest margin slightly improved during the quarter. We maintained our disciplined expense control management and credit costs are continuing to decline as the Hawaii economy recovers."

The return on average assets for the first quarter of 2012 was 1.29 percent, up from 1.17 percent in the previous quarter, and down from 1.32 percent for the same quarter last year. The return on average equity for the first quarter of 2012 was 17.26 percent compared to 15.23 percent for the fourth quarter of 2011 and 16.86 percent in the first quarter of 2011. The efficiency ratio for the first quarter of 2012 was 58.35 percent, an improvement from 60.42 percent in the previous quarter.

Bank of Hawaii

Net interest income, on a taxable equivalent basis, for the first quarter of 2012 was $100.0 million, up $2.8 million from net interest income of $97.2 million in the fourth quarter of 2011 and essentially flat with net interest income of $100.1 million in the first quarter of 2011. Analyses of the changes in net interest income are included in Tables 8a and 8b.

The net interest margin was 3.06 percent for the first quarter of 2012, a 2 basis point increase from the net interest margin of 3.04 percent in the fourth quarter of 2011 and an 18 basis point decrease from 3.24 percent in the first quarter of 2011. The increase in the net interest margin compared to the fourth quarter is largely due to an improving balance sheet mix. The decrease in the net interest margin compared to the first quarter of 2011 was primarily due to higher levels of liquidity and lower yields on loans and investment securities.

Results for the first quarter of 2012 included a provision for credit losses of $0.4 million, or $3.0 million less than net charge-offs. The provision for credit losses during the fourth quarter of 2011 was $2.2 million, or $4.8 million less than net charge-offs. The provision for credit losses of $4.7 million equaled net charge-offs during the first quarter of 2011.

Bank of Hawaii Corporation is a regional financial services company serving businesses, consumers and governments in Hawaii, American Samoa and the West Pacific. The Company's principal subsidiary, Bank of Hawaii, was founded in 1897 and is the largest independent financial institution in Hawaii. For more information about Bank of Hawaii Corporation, see the Company's web site, www.boh.com. ***(BOH)***

Nation

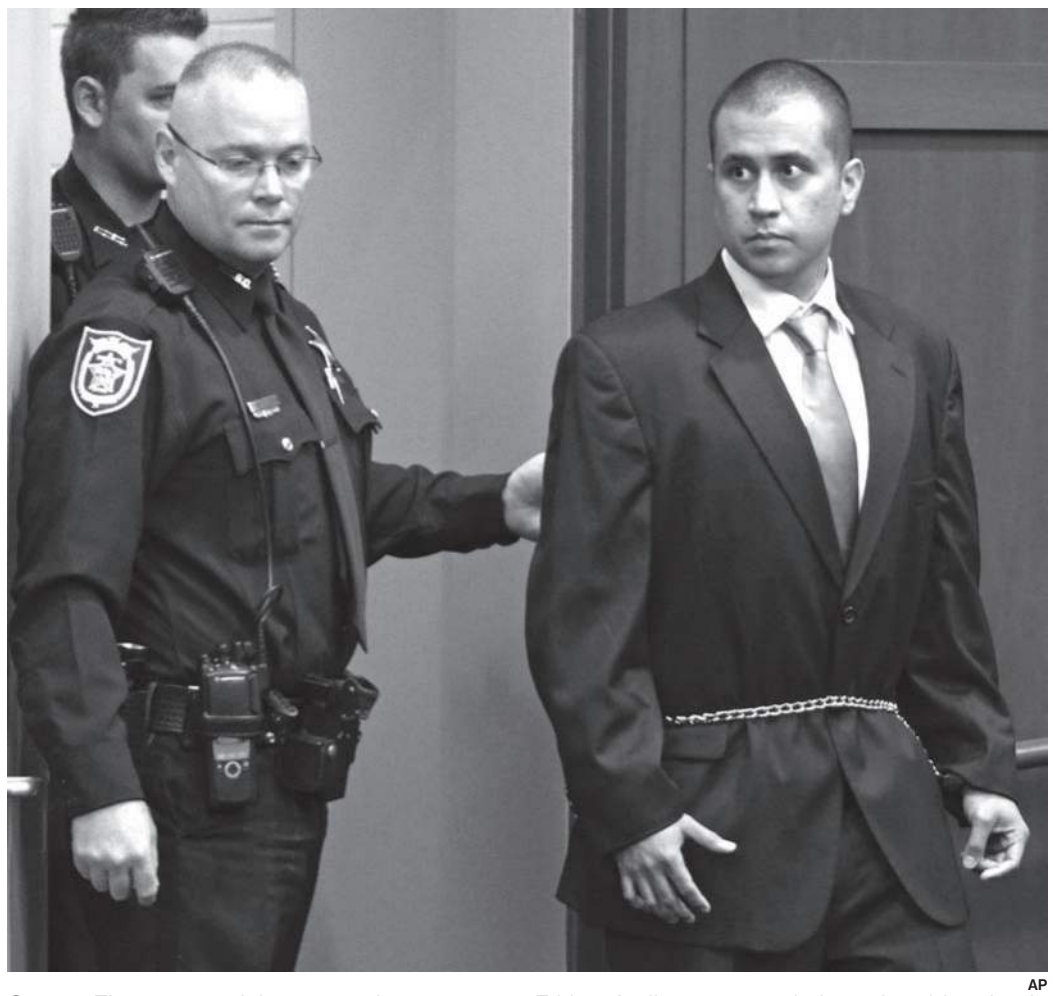
Now out of jail, George Zimmerman fades from sight

SANFORD, Fla. (AP)—George Zimmerman, who slipped out of jail on $150,000 bail in the early morning darkness, went back into hiding Monday and likely fled to another state to avoid threats as he awaits his second-degree murder trial for the killing of Trayvon Martin.

Later Monday, the Sanford City Commission rejected by a 3-2 vote the resignation of Police Chief Bill Lee, who was roundly criticized for not initially charging Zimmerman and had stepped down temporarily in March he said to let emotions cool.

Even though authorities can pinpoint Zimmerman's location with a GPS ankle bracelet, that he must wear round the clock, the public may not see him again for some time. Zimmerman has waived his appearance at his upcoming arraignment next month, so he can stay underground if he wants.

"He's doing well, he's very glad to be out, trying to get settled in, still worried about his safety, but, you know, talking to his family and feeling much better than being in" jail, Zimmerman's attorney, Mark O'Mara, said Monday night on CNN's Anderson Cooper 360.



AP

George Zimmerman, right, enters the courtroom, Friday, April 20, 2012, during a bond hearing in Sanford, Fla.

O'Mara declined to say if Zimmerman was in Florida, only saying his client will travel to several locations for his safety. O'Mara did not immediately return phone calls Monday by The Associated Press.

Zimmerman already has experience laying low: For more than a month before his arrest, he eluded the media and his whereabouts were not known. His attorney has suggested he had several options for where Zimmerman can stay this time, and a judge indicated he was willing to let Zimmerman leave the state.

Until the next time he must come before a judge, Zimmerman will have to skip such routine pleasures as eating in a restaurant or taking a long stroll outside, said Jose Baez, a former attorney for Casey Anthony. Anthony, acquitted last summer of killing her 2-year-old daughter, went into hiding after her release from jail.

"He may be free, but he's not free," Baez said.

First, Zimmerman must limit who knows his whereabouts to avoid the risk someone will give the secret away, Baez said.

"Unfortunately, the people you think you trust, sometimes you find you just really can't," Baez said.

The police chief is on paid leave. Not too long ago, the commissioners gave him a "no confidence vote" that city Manager Norton Bonaparte said still stands. The shooting also led to the local prosecutor recusing himself from the case, and the governor appointing Angela Corey, who eventually charged Zimmerman.

The majority of commissioners on Monday blamed the polarization over the Martin case and its handling by the police department on outside groups. Lee had supporters at the meeting who wore, "Bring Back Billy" T-shirts, though there were detractors as well.

"I'm disappointed but not surprised," said Velma Williams, the lone black representative on the commission who voted to accept the resignation.

Romney backs student loan proposal Obama supports

ASTON, Pa. (AP)—Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney on Monday embraced a student loan proposal that President Barack Obama is selling on the campaign trail and refused to endorse Sen. Marco Rubio's conservative immigration plan aimed at helping young illegal immigrants.

The two policy positions signaled an effort by Romney to move to the political center as he works to court critical general election swing voters—including young voters and Hispanic voters—after a brutal primary fight.

"I think young voters in this country have to vote for me if they're really thinking of what's in the best interest of the country and what's in their personal best interest," Romney said as he stood next to Rubio, R-Fla.

AP

Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla. smiles at left as he joins Republican presidential candidate, former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney for a news conference prior to a town hall-style meeting in Aston, Pa., Monday, April 23, 2012.

Romney was campaigning in Pennsylvania a day before the state's primary—he doesn't have serious opposition now that Sen. Rick Santorum has dropped out of the race—and answered reporters' questions for the first time since effectively securing the GOP presidential nomination.

House Republicans have said the estimated $6 billion annual cost of extending low-interest rates for student loans isn't affordable without offsetting cuts but that they are still deciding whether to support a temporary extension. Obama has started pushing Congress for the extension and planned a three-state tour this week to warn students of the potential financial catastrophe they will face if Congress fails to act.

Interest rates are set to double on July 1, from 3.4 percent to 6.8 percent, on a popular federal loan for low- and middle-income undergraduates.

"I support extending the temporary relief on interest rates for students," Romney said Monday, a day before five states hold primaries, though he did not offer specifics on how the extension should be paid for or how long it should last. He said he supports the extension because of "extraordinarily poor conditions in the job market."

California college resumes class after attack

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP)—With the horrors of a deadly shooting rampage still a fresh memory, some students at a California Christian college returned to class Monday in a building where seven people were killed earlier this month.

Oakland's Oikos University—still draped with a memorial banner, wreaths and flower bouquets—held a single English-as-a-second-language class three weeks after police said a nursing student fatally shot six of his fellow students and a receptionist.

The small school in an industrial area of the city has been busy preparing to resume operations by replacing carpet and removing bloodstains and bullet scars.

One L. Goh, 43, a native of South Korea who had become a U.S. citizen, was charged with seven counts of murder and three counts of attempted murder. He has not yet entered a plea.

Lucas Garcia, who was teaching Monday's class, was in the building at the time of the shootings. He has been spending time getting in touch with students since the attack and believes it's important to come back to campus and move on.

"They feel very scared and are dealing with a lot of emotions about what happened," Garcia said. "They're dealing with symptoms of a very traumatic experience."

Arriving students declined to talk to reporters.

In a previous jailhouse interview with KPIX-TV, Goh said he is deeply sorry about the shooting.

"I only remember parts of that day and it is too hard to talk about," Goh told the station, at times weeping.

Goh has not eaten since his April 3 arrival at the Santa Rita Jail, Alameda County sheriff's spokesman Sgt. J.D. Nelson said Monday.

Goh has lost about 20 pounds and is only drinking water, and he was moved to the jail infirmary Friday, Nelson said. Doctors are monitoring Goh's condition.

"He has the right not to eat. We cannot force him to eat," Nelson said.

Back at Oikos, school dean Jongjin Kim said most students will take classes in the same building where the shootings occurred, with nursing students permitted to attend Unitek College in Fremont.

Goh went to the campus April 2 after becoming angry over a tuition dispute, Kim has said. The school had refused to reimburse $4,000 to $6,000 in tuition after Goh dropped out last fall.

Police said he arrived at the school that day with a .45-caliber semiautomatic handgun, which was later found in a nearby waterway. They said he may have been targeting certain staff members.

12th military member tied to prostitution scandal

WASHINGTON (AP)—The Secret Service prostitution scandal grew Monday to include a 12th member of the U.S. military as the Pentagon suspended the security clearances of all the military personnel who have been implicated. The Secret Service has also taken action against 12 of its employees.

Three Defense Department officials said the 12th military person involved was in Colombia in advance of President Barack Obama's arrival for the Summit of the Americas and was assigned to the White House Communications Agency, a military unit that provides secure communications for the president. The defense officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because the investigation is ongoing, said he is an enlisted man. One of the officials said he is in the Army.

Another of the officials said the soldier has been relieved of his duties at the White House.

Meanwhile, the White House still faced fire Monday because of the prostitution scandal. It moved anew to keep itself at arm's length in two ways. Led by its top lawyer, the White House internally investigated and then ruled out misconduct by the White House staff members who helped arrange the president's trip ahead of his arrival in Colombia. Obama's chief spokesman, Jay Carney, sought to make clear that the "White House Communications Agency," which has now been implicated by the widening scandal, is a military unit and not a White House one.

"These are military personnel, staffed by the military, they are not members of the White House staff, they are not chosen by the White House senior staff," Carney said.

Iowa Sen. Chuck Grassley, the top Republican on the Senate Judiciary Committee, sent a letter to the White House asking for the specific details of the White House counsel investigation.

Defense Secretary Leon Panetta said the Pentagon has suspended the security clearances of the dozen military members under investigation in the scandal. The Secret Service had previously revoked the top-secret clearances for the officers involved.

Asia

Manila seeks int'l support in standoff with China

MANILA, Philippines (AP)—The Philippines warned Monday that China's sweeping territorial claims in the South China Sea may eventually threaten freedom of navigation in the busy region and called on Western and Asian countries to take a stand against any such potential threat.

China's ambiguous territorial claims have brought it into a tense, 14-day high seas standoff with the Philippines over the Scarborough Shoal, which both Asian countries claim. China's aggressive actions at the shoal—including ordering ships to leave and flying a Chinese plane low over one of them—show what it could do to the rest of the South China Sea, which Beijing claims virtually in its entirety, Department of Foreign Affairs spokesman Raul Hernandez said.

Chinese surveillance ships have told a lone Philippine coast guard vessel to leave the uninhabited but resource-rich shoal, which lies between the northwestern Philippines and the South China Sea, saying China has sovereignty over the area. The Filipino vessel has refused to leave, saying it's Philippine territory.

Only one Chinese surveillance ship remained in the area after two others pulled out on Sunday, a spokesman for the Chinese Embassy in Manila was quoted as saying Monday by the official Xinhua News Agency.

"The withdrawal of the two ships proves once again China is not escalating the situation as some people said, but de-escalating the situation," Zhang Hua was quoted as saying.

He said China is prepared to settle the standoff through "friendly diplomatic consultations."

AP

Protesters hold a rally outside the Chinese Consulate at the financial district of Makati city, east of Manila, Philippines, to protest the current standoff between Philippine and Chinese vessels at the disputed Scarborough Shoal in the South China Sea Friday.

So far, the two sides have failed to resolve the tense impasse.

China, the Philippines and other countries have also been engaged in long-simmering territorial rifts elsewhere in the South China Sea, which is crisscrossed by one of the world's busiest commercial sea lanes, accounts for about 10 percent of the annual global fisheries catch and is believed to have rich oil and gas deposits.

China has claimed virtually the entire South China Sea for years. Now, it could aggressively assert its claims as shown by its actions at Scarborough, Hernandez told reporters. "This is a manifestation of a potential threat to freedom of navigation as well as unimpeded commerce in the area."

Foreign Secretary Albert Del Rosario said that with Beijing claiming almost everything in the South China Sea, the message is they "can set the rules for anybody."

"I think the current standoff is a manifestation of a larger threat to many nations," he told ABS-CBN TV network in an interview. "They should be concerned if they're interested in maintaining the freedom of navigation and unimpeded commerce."

Del Rosario and Defense Secretary Voltaire Gazmin will raise the Scarborough Shoal incident when they meet their U.S. counterparts in Washington next week, Hernandez told a news conference, adding that the United States has been concerned about ensuring freedom of navigation in Southeast Asian waters.

In Beijing, Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Weimin reiterated China's sovereignty over the shoal, which Beijing calls Huangyan island, and added that involving other nations in the dispute would only complicate the problem.

The International Crisis Group, meanwhile, said in a report Monday that China's deployment of more surveillance and paramilitary ships, which are tasked to assert Beijing's unclear territorial claims, risks more confrontations in the South China Sea.

The Chinese ships have figured in major flare-ups, including in the standoff at Scarborough, the ICG said.

The Brussels-based group said China has so far refused to define the exact extent of its claims, causing confusion and fostering potential conflicts.

Some Chinese patrol ships were unaware of the limits of the areas where they were supposed to assert sovereignty, the ICG said.

Philippine officials have asked China to bring their disputes to the United Nations for arbitration, a process that would require both to delineate their claims. But Chinese officials have insisted on negotiating with other claimants individually.

North Korea vows to turn South's leadership to ashes

PYONGYANG, North Korea (AP)—North Korea sharply escalated the rhetoric against its southern rival, claiming it will soon conduct "special actions" that would reduce South Korea's conservative government to ashes within minutes.

Monday's threat from the North's military leadership comes amid concerns that North Korea may be plotting another provocation in the wake of an unsuccessful rocket launch condemned by the U.N. Security Council as a violation of a ban against missile activity.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon urged North Korea to refrain from "further provocative measures," telling reporters in New York late Monday that such actions "will not be desirable for the peace and stability of the Korean peninsula."

North Korea characterized the April 13 rocket launch as a failed bid to send a satellite into space—not a disguised test of missile technology as Washington and Seoul claim. Two days after the attempt, Pyongyang unveiled a new long-range missile at a military birthday parade for late President Kim Il Sung.

There are new concerns that North Korea may conduct a nuclear test as it did after rocket launches in 2006 and 2009. South Korean intelligence officials say recent satellite images show the North has been digging a new tunnel in what could be preparation for a third atomic test.

On the North Korean side of the Demilitarized Zone, a military guide told The Associated Press that he believes his country needs atomic weapons to defend itself against the threat of attack from the U.S.

"Nuclear weapons are not the monopoly of the United States," Lt. Col. Nam Dong Ho said. "It's my personal opinion, but I think we'll continue to conduct nuclear tests."

On Monday, the military warned in a statement carried by the state-run Korean Central News Agency that it would launch "special actions" soon against the South Korean government and conservative media.

For days, North Korea has railed against South Korean President Lee Myung-bak and conservative South Korean media for criticizing its rocket launch and the celebrations of the centennial of Kim Il Sung's birth. But the military message, attributed to the "special operation action group" of the Korean People's Army's Supreme Command, was unusual in its specificity.

"Once the above-said special actions kick off, they will reduce all the rat-like groups and the bases for provocations to ashes in three or four minutes, in much shorter time, by unprecedented peculiar means and methods of our own style," it said.

The threat comes as North Korea's new commander in chief, Kim Jong Un, makes a show of support for the "military first" policy championed by his late father and predecessor, Kim Jong Il. North Korea marks the 80th anniversary of the founding of its army Wednesday.

ASIA BRIEFS

China punishes 20 officials after village protests

BEIJING (AP)—Chinese authorities have punished 20 officials and former village leaders after the community in southern China engaged in mass protests over land disputes that drove out local officials. The official Xinhua News Agency said late Monday that the former Communist Party chief of Wukan village in Guangdong province and the former head of the village committee were expelled from the ruling party and ordered to return nearly $45,000 in what it described as illegal gains. Six other former village officials and a dozen higher-level officials were also punished, Xinhua said, but did not provide details.

Sri Lanka to demolish mosque after monks' protest

DAMBULLA, Sri Lanka (AP)—Sri Lankan officials have decided to demolish a mosque and a Hindu temple under pressure from Buddhist monks who demanded their removal from a Buddhist sacred area. Ruling party lawmaker Lakshman Perera said Monday that the places of worship and other buildings will be relocated to sites outside the designated sacred zone within six months. Thousands of Buddhist monks and lay supporters stormed the mosque in the central Sri Lankan town of Dambulla on Friday, saying it was constructed illegally. They forced their way into the building and damaged some furniture, dispersing only after officials promised a solution on Monday.

US-Afghan security pact sends warning to al-Qaida

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP)—A new strategic partnership that commits the U.S. to defend Afghanistan militarily for 10 years after most foreign forces leave in 2014 is intended to signal that the U.S. will not tolerate a resurgent al-Qaida or attacks launched by militants from neighboring Pakistan.

The agreement, parts of which were read out Monday in the Afghan parliament, is big on symbolism but light on substance. It leaves out specifics, including how much funding the U.S. will provide to support Afghan security forces or how many U.S. troops will stay on after the withdrawal deadline.

Afghanistan, for its part, insisted on approving any American military operations after 2014 and barred the U.S. from using its soil to attack other countries, such as neighboring Pakistan, where the Taliban, al-Qaida and al-Qaida-linked militants all have staging bases.

"In the end, of course, the U.S. and allied interests differ from those of most Afghans," said Andrew Exum, a senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security, a think tank in Washington.

"The United States is most concerned with dismantling al-Qaida, while Afghans are most concerned with what infrastructure and financing the United States and its allies will provide beyond 2014."

After 10 years of U.S.-led war, insurgents linked to the Taliban and al-Qaida remain a threat and as recently as a week ago launched a large-scale attack on the capital, Kabul, and three other cities. Both groups operate from within Afghanistan, as well as from across the border in Pakistan.

It took 18 months of painstaking, often tense negotiations to hammer out the accord, which was reached Sunday and lays out for the first time the relationship the U.S. will have with Afghanistan once the majority of U.S. troops have gone home. It builds on hard-won understandings reached recently on the controversial issues of control over detainees and the conduct of night raids by U.S. special forces.

Exum said the Obama administration had hoped to have the agreement finalized last summer, but Afghan leaders—notably President Hamid Karzai—were reluctant to agree to a continued U.S. military presence beyond 2014.

"The United States and the government of Afghanistan were able to find enough common ground to get an agreement on tough issues such as detainees, basing rights, and the so-called night raids. This is a real diplomatic achievement for the Obama administration," Exum said.

World

Sarkozy targets far-right in bid to win runoff

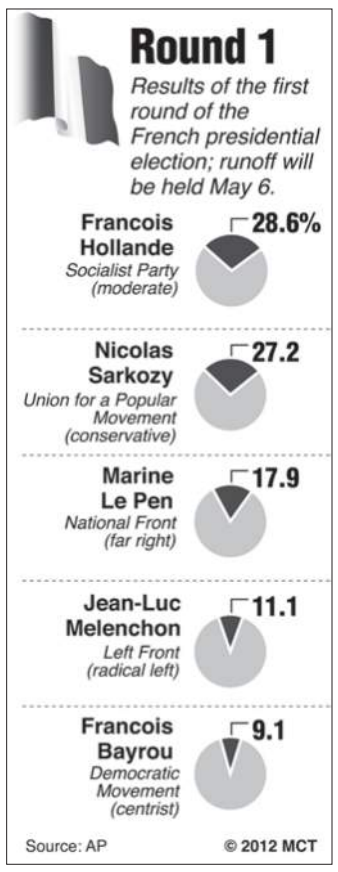
PARIS (AP)—President Nicolas Sarkozy starkly laid out his path to re-election Monday: He will be plunging deep into far-right territory to hunt the votes he needs to beat Socialist challenger Francois Hollande in the runoff.

A day after Hollande won a slim upper hand in the first round of voting, Sarkozy candidly ogled voters of the far-right National Front whose candidate, Marine Le Pen, placed a solid third. She gave the party its highest-ever score, nearly 18 percent—close to one-in-five voters and the biggest surprise of Sunday's first round vote.

Le Pen and her anti-immigration party want to pull France out of the euro currency, reinstate border controls, crack down on immigrants and stamp out what she claims is the Islamization of France.

AP

France's President and candidate for re-election in 2012, Nicolas Sarkozy, bits farewell after he visits winemakers in Vouvray, central France, April 23, 2012.



"The word 'protectionism' isn't a dirty word," Sarkozy said Monday during a rousing speech in Saint-Cyr-Sur-Loire, near Tours, southwest of Paris.

Protecting the French identity, French civilization, French borders, French workers, French youth, French retirees were all on Sarkozy's agenda—and all are themes dear to the National Front.

Sarkozy and Hollande, both 57, used their first post-election speeches to lure far-right voters to their respective camps ahead of the May 6 final round. But Hollande did so more softly.

The math is brutal. Hollande won 28.6 percent of Sunday's vote, Sarkozy won 27.2 percent and both need votes from Le Pen's far right to climb over 50 percent—but mostly Sarkozy. Hollande is expected to get many of the backers of far-left candidate Jean-Luc Melenchon who won 11 percent. The 9 percent who voted for centrist candidate Francois Bayrou are also in play.

Sarkozy named the National Front, and in a bid to destigmatize those who vote for the far-right party, said he respects them. On the left some people "hold their noses," he said. "I want to say that we have heard them (the far right) and know how to respond with precise commitments."

The commitment he clearly named was tightening French borders—with or without other European countries—to keep them from becoming a "sieve" for immigrants and others.

"Europe must change so as not to be perceived as a threat but as a protection," he said.

For his part, Hollande said some voters cast ballots for Le Pen because they feel the system has left them behind.

"We have to look further for voters," Hollande said in a speech in Quimper, in the western region of Brittany. "Women and men who don't know where to go ... go toward the extreme."

Both candidates warned about the spread of populism around Europe—what Sarkozy called a "crisis vote" by a population hurt by the effects of the debt crisis and left behind in a globalized world.

Syrian forces kill dozens after UN monitors' visit

BEIRUT (AP)—A day ago, crowds in the Syrian city of Hama welcomed a U.N. team sent in to observe a shaky truce. On Monday, government troops opened fire on the same streets, killing dozens, activists said, raising fears the regime is targeting opponents emboldened to protest by the U.N. monitors.

U.S. President Barack Obama and European countries announced new sanctions against Damascus, while the U.N.'s political chief said the Syrian government has failed to implement the peace plan designed to end 13 months of deadly conflict that has killed more than 9,000 people.

The new bloodshed—the worst violence in the central city of Hama in months—came despite the cease-fire that went into effect April 12. Skepticism about the commitment to the truce by Syrian President Bashar Assad remains high among the regime's opponents and some of the peace plan's key backers, such as the United States.

U.N. political chief B. Lynn Pascoe told the Security Council that the Syrian government is still using heavy weapons against its people and has failed to implement key parts of the plan, such as releasing detainees and allowing peaceful demonstrations. The cease-fire is supposed to allow for dialogue on a political solution between Assad's regime and those seeking his ouster.

"Human rights violations are still perpetrated with impunity," Pascoe said.

The U.N. has sent an advance team of 11 observers to Syria to push forward the peace plan put forth by envoy Kofi Annan. More monitors are due to be on the ground by the end of the month, the U.N. said, part of a mission of 300 total.

While deaths nationwide dipped in recent days, the violence in Hama and elsewhere Monday suggested the regime was attacking those who voiced grievances to the observers.

"This was the punishment for the people of Hama because yesterday they were very brave when they met the U.N. monitors," activist Mousab Alhamadee said via Skype.

World sea piracy drops 28 percent in Q1

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia (AP)—Sea piracy worldwide dropped 28 percent in the first quarter of the year as attacks fell sharply in Somalia's waters thanks to international naval patrols, an international maritime watchdog said Monday.

Pirate attacks intensified, however, in Nigeria and Indonesia.

The number of worldwide attacks from January to March dipped to 102 from 142 cases in the same period in 2011, the International Maritime Bureau's piracy reporting center in Kuala Lumpur said. It said 11 vessels were hijacked and 212 crew members taken hostage, compared with 18 ships seized and 344 people taken hostage a year earlier.

In Somalia, there were 43 attacks, including nine vessel hijackings, compared with 97 attacks a year ago. The agency attributed the decline to "disruptive actions and pre-emptive strikes" by navies in the region.

Multiple navies—including a large U.S. presence—patrol the Gulf of Aden and the wider Indian Ocean, and many private ships now carry armed guards.

The European Union Naval Force recently said it would expand its mission to include Somalia's coast and waterways inside the country for the first time, making its battle against piracy more proactive.

"It is unlikely that the threat of Somali piracy will diminish in the short to medium term unless further actions are taken," the agency said. "The EU announcement to expand their anti-piracy mission to target pirates ashore is another welcome move that could further threaten the Somali piracy model."

As of the end of March, suspected Somali pirates still held 15 vessels and 253 crew members, with an additional 49 crew members hostage on land, the agency said.

On Monday, Italy's Foreign Ministry said Somali pirates had freed the 18-member crew of an Italian tanker hijacked off Oman four months ago.

Foreign Minister Giulio Terzi didn't say if any ransom was paid for the release of the crew of the "Enrico Ievoli."

Elsewhere, pirate attacks intensified in Nigeria and Indonesia.

Pirates attacked 10 vessels off Nigeria in the first quarter, equaling the same number reported for the whole of last year. The agency said Nigerian pirates were also responsible for an attack in neighboring Benin during the period.

Official: Sudan bombs 3 areas in South Sudan

RUBKONA, South Sudan (AP)—Sudanese warplanes bombed a market and an oil field in South Sudan on Monday, killing at least two people after Sudanese ground forces had reportedly crossed into South Sudan with tanks and artillery, elevating the risk of all-out war between the two old enemies.

The international community urged Sudan and South Sudan to talk out their disputes, which include arguments over where the border lies and over ownership of oil resources.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon condemned the Sudanese bombings and called on the government in Khartoum "to cease all hostilities immediately," U.N. deputy spokesman Eduardo del Buey said.

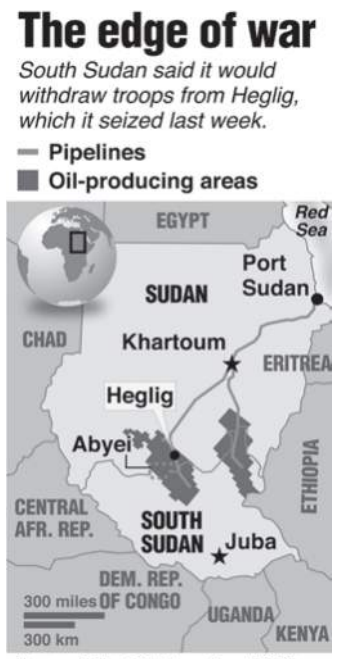
Ban stressed again that the dispute cannot be solved militarily and urged Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir and South Sudan's President Salva Kiir "to stop the slide towards further confrontation and ... return to dialogue as a matter of urgency," the spokesman said.

But al-Bashir vowed Monday to press ahead with his military campaign until all southern troops or affiliated forces are chased out of the north.

The bombs fell from two MiG 29 jets onto Rubkona's market with a whistling sound, turning stalls where food and other household items are sold into fiery heaps of twisted metal. The burned body of the boy lay flat on his back near the center of the blast site, his hand clutching at the sky.

South Sudan military spokesman Col. Philip Aguer said two were killed in that attack and nine wounded.

Aguer said Antonov bombers accompanied by MiG 29 jets also bombed Abiemnom in Unity State and the Unity State oil field. He said Abiemnom is a two-hour drive from Rubkona. Amid poor communications, the extent of damage at the oil field was not immediately known, nor whether there were casualties. Fighting between ground troops, which started Sunday, was still ongoing in Panakuac, Laloba and Teshwin, Aguer said.



In Rubkona, trucks packed with South Sudanese troops sped off in the direction where the bombs landed as the soldiers fired at the Sudanese jets.

"The bombing amounts to a declaration of war," said Maj. Gen. Mac Paul, the Deputy Director of Military Intelligence for South Sudan.

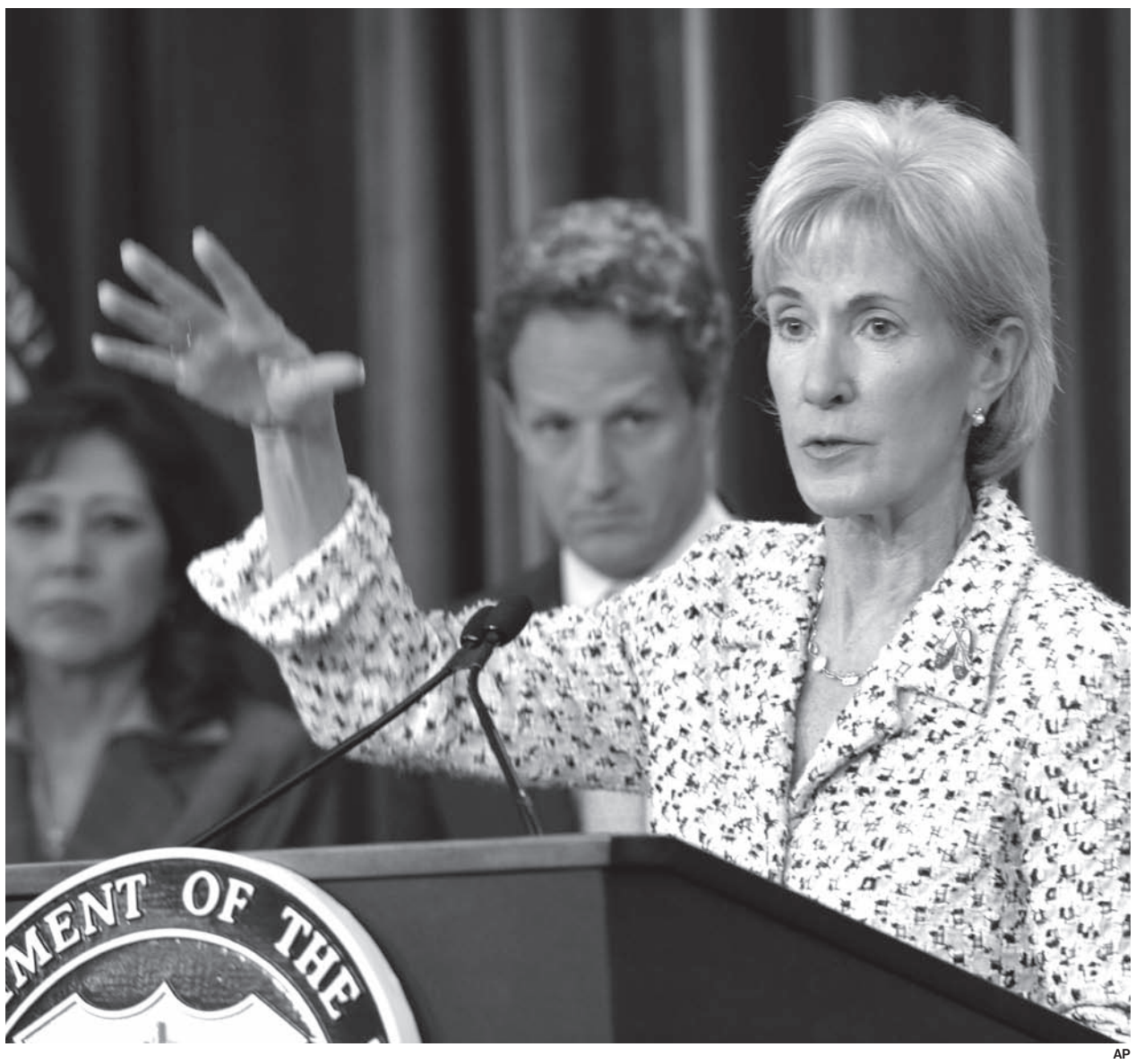
U.S. State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said Monday the U.S. strongly condemns Sudan's military incursion into South Sudan, and called for the immediate halt of aerial and artillery bombardment in South Sudan.

"We recognize the right of South Sudan to self-defense and urge South Sudan to exercise restraint in its reaction to Sudan's attack in Unity State," she said.

Focus

Social Security
heading for insolvency even faster

By STEPHEN OHLEMACHER and RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR
ASSOCIATED PRESS



AP

Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner, center, and Labor Secretary Hilda Solis, left, listen as Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius speaks at a news conference on the Social Security and Medicare Trustees Reports, Monday, April 23, 2012, at the Treasury Department in Washington. Trustees update forecasts for the government's two largest benefit programs, which are laboring under the weight of retiring baby boomers, revenue shortages and politicians' reluctance to take painful action to fix them.

WASHINGTON (AP)—Social Security is rushing even faster toward insolvency, driven by retiring baby boomers, a weak economy and politicians' reluctance to take painful action to fix the huge retirement and disability program.

The trust funds that support Social Security will run dry in 2033—three years earlier than previously projected—the government said Monday.

There was no change in the year that Medicare's hospital insurance fund is projected to run out of money. It's still 2024. The program's trustees, however, said the pace of Medicare spending continues to accelerate. Congress enacted a 2 percent cut for Medicare last year, and that is the main reason the trust fund exhaustion date did not advance.

The trustees who oversee both programs say high energy prices are suppressing workers' wages, a trend they see continuing. They also expect people to work fewer hours than previously projected, even after the economy recovers. Both trends would lead to lower payroll tax receipts, which support both programs.

Unless Congress acts—and forcefully—payments to millions of Americans could be cut.

If the Social Security and Medicare funds ever become exhausted, the nation's two biggest benefit programs would collect only enough money in payroll taxes to pay partial benefits. Social Security could cover about 75 percent of benefits, the trustees said in their annual report. Medicare's giant hospital fund could pay 87 percent of costs.

"Lawmakers should not delay addressing the long-run financial challenges facing Social Security and Medicare," the trustees wrote. "If they take action sooner rather than later, more options and more time will be available to phase in changes so that the public has adequate time to prepare."

The trustees project that Social Security benefits will increase next year, though the increase could be small. They project a cost-of-living-adjustment, or COLA, of 1.8 percent for 2013; the actual amount won't be known until October.

Beneficiaries got a 3.6 percent increase this year, the first after two years without one.

More than 56 million retirees, disabled workers, spouses and children receive Social Security. The average retirement benefit is $1,232 a month; the average monthly benefit for disabled workers is $1,111.

About 50 million people are covered by Medicare, the medical insurance program for older Americans.

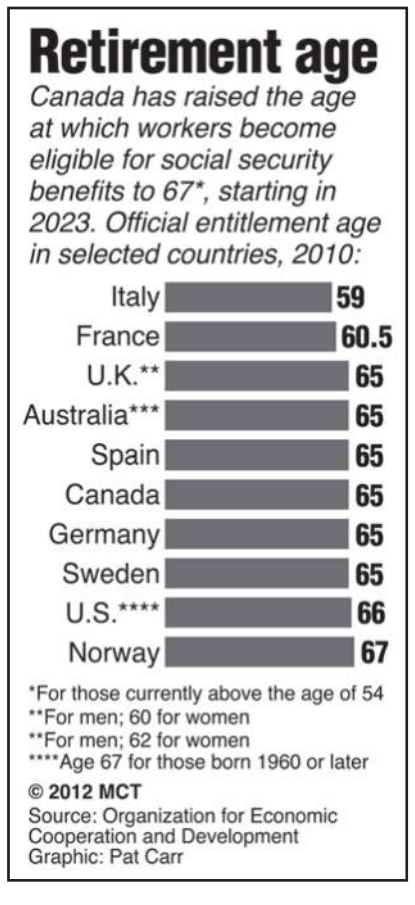
America's aging population—increased by millions of retiring baby boomers—is straining both Social Security and Medicare. Potential options to reduce Social Security costs include raising the full retirement age, which already is being gradually increased to 67, reducing annual benefit increases and limiting benefits for wealthier Americans.

Policymakers could also increase the amount of wages that are subject to Social Security taxes. Social Security is financed by a 6.2 percent tax on the first $110,100 in workers' wages. It is paid by both employers and workers. Congress temporarily reduced the tax on workers to 4.2 percent for 2011 and 2012, though the program's finances are being made whole through increased government borrowing.

The Medicare tax rate is 1.45 percent on all wages, paid by both employees and workers.

Social Security is split into two funds—one for retirement and survivor benefits and one for disability. The retirement fund is projected to run out of money in 2035 while the disability fund is projected to run dry in 2016. Combined, the two funds will last until 2033.

In the absence of a long-term solution, the trustees who oversee Social Security are urging Congress to shore up the disability system by reallocating money from the retirement program, just as lawmakers did in 1994.


Retirement age
Canada has raised the age at which workers become eligible for social security benefits to 67*, starting in 2023. Official entitlement age in selected countries, 2010:
Italy 59
France 60.5
U.K.** 65
Australia*** 65
Spain 65
Canada 65
Germany 65
Sweden 65
U.S.**** 66
Norway 67
*For those currently above the age of 54
**For men; 60 for women
**For men; 62 for women
****Age 67 for those born 1960 or later
© 2012 MCT
Source: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
Graphic: Pat Carr

Social Security's trust funds contain a total of $2.7 trillion. The money is invested in U.S. Treasury bonds. The government has used the cash to pay for other programs.

The trust funds have been paying out more in benefits than they have collected in payroll taxes since 2010. The funds, however, will continue to grow until 2021 because they will earn interest on the Treasury bonds, the trustees said.

Many advocates for seniors worry that Washington is too focused on benefit cuts as a way to shore up Social Security. They argue that the program's finances are not as dire as some policymakers contend.

"After 77 years and 13 recessions, Social Security continues to prove itself time and again as the most effective public program in our nation's history, keeping its promise to our seniors, disabled workers, widows and children," said Rep. Xavier Becerra, the top Democrat on the House Social Security Subcommittee.

Medicare is trickier to address because it has to contend with health care inflation, not just an aging population. Options include raising the eligibility age, cutting payments to service providers, shifting more costs to beneficiaries or even privatizing the program.

On Monday, Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner called Social Security and Medicare the "twin pillars of retirement security in this country," and he declared, "It is critical that reforms are slowly phased in over time so current beneficiaries are not affected and future beneficiaries do not experience precipitous changes."

President Barack Obama's health care law is supposed to trim Medicare expenses by $500 billion, extending the life of the program. But some independent experts doubt the full savings will materialize, and even the administration concedes more cuts are needed. If Republicans succeed in repealing the law, they will have to come up with similar cuts of their own.

"The Affordable Care Act began this process with the most significant entitlement reform in decades," Geithner said, referring to the new health law.

Alternative cost projections prepared by the trustees' technical experts suggest the Medicare cuts in the health care law would be unsustainable, driving payment rates so low that 15 percent of hospitals, nursing homes and home health providers would be in the red by 2019.

The trustees conceded that their own Medicare projections could be too rosy. Based on current law, they assume cuts in payments to doctors that Congress routinely waives will actually take place. They also assume the health care law will squeeze the full amount of its cuts from the program.

"Medicare's actual future costs are highly uncertain and are likely to exceed those shown ...in this report," the trustees said.

Republicans, including presidential candidate Mitt Romney, are proposing to overhaul Medicare by converting it into a system that mainly relies on private health insurance plans to cover future retirees. Beneficiaries would get a fixed payment from the government, with low-income seniors in poor health receiving more.

Obama says he wants to preserve the existing program and its federally guaranteed benefits. But in negotiations with congressional Republicans last year, he went further than most Democrats by signaling he was willing to raise the eligibility age by two years to 67. He's also willing to limit future increases in Medicare spending, a policy that prompts serious misgivings from groups such as AARP.

"Today's report reminds us that Medicare must be reformed and strengthened or it will soon collapse," said Lanhee Chen, Romney's policy director.

The trustees who oversee the programs are Geithner, Social Security Commissioner Michael J. Astrue, Labor Secretary Hilda Solis and Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius. There are also two public trustees, Charles Blahous and Robert Reischauer.

Campus Life

A big success for GCA forensics

Grace Christian Academy students finished with a big success in the recently concluded forensic arts competitions in all divisions.

Fourteen GCA kindergarten to 5th grade competitors garnered 14 major awards in the Primary Grades Forensic Conference. Clerisse Dacumos, who won first place in Impromptu Speaking, will represent GCA in the PGFC special presentation at the end of the school year.

For the National Junior Forensic League, eight students won 12 major awards. GCA got most of the NJFL gold medals, qualifying four students who won first place in five different events to represent the CNMI in the NJFL national competition. Angela Cruz and Rebekah Kim will compete for Duo Interpretation, Angela Cruz for Dramatic Interpretation, Yujin Lee for Poetry Reading, and Asako Camacho for Prose Reading.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO
Grace Christian Academy's PGFC regional winners have their picture taken inside the GCA campus.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO
Grace Christian Academy's NJFL regional winners have their picture taken inside the GCA campus.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO
Grace Christian Academy's NFL regional winners have their picture taken inside the GCA campus.

In the high school division, two National Forensic League students will represent the CNMI in the national competition. Gold medalists Terence Ho will compete for Impromptu Speech and Angela Mamaril will do Original Oratory. All of the six GCA NJFL and NFL students will join the CNMI team in going to Indianapolis, Indiana, on June 10-17 this year for the national competition.

Organized by the National Forensic Board and supported by the CNMI Public School System, the PGFC, NJFL, and NFL competitions encourage public and private school students to participate in and become proficient in the forensic arts: reading, debate, public speaking, and interpretations.

PGFC K-5TH GRADE

Impromptu Speaking
Clerisse Dacumos, 1st Place
Kei Lizama, 2nd Place
Christina Kim, 3rd Place
Jada Buniag, 5th Place

Dramatic Interpretation
Juruel Magtalas, 3rd Place
Lyssa Steele, 4th Place
Julianna Magtalas, 5th Place

Humorous Interpretation
Eunice Pagaduan, 5th Place

Choral Speaking
Chelsea Henson, 5th Place
Briston Jones, 5th Place
Katelyn Mafnas, 5th Place
Eunice Pagaduan, 5th Place

3-5 Division

Impromptu Speaking
Joshua Pajarillaga, 2nd Place
Marcelo Masilungan Jr., 3rd Place
Jim Michael Ham, 4th Place

Duo Interpretation
Riley Anne Buenaventura, 2nd Place
Tae Yong Kim, 2nd Place

Esther Kim, 4th Place
Calia Lieto, 4th Place

NJFL 6TH-8TH GRADE

Duo Interpretation
Rebekah Kim, 1st Place
Angela Cruz, 1st Place
Danica Canedo, 2nd Place
Macy Sarmiento, 2nd Place
Asako Camacho, 3rd Place
Allexa Go, 3rd Place

Poetry Reading
Yu Jin Lee, 1st Place
Rebekah Kim, 2nd Place
Angela Cruz, 3rd Place

Prose Reading
Asako Camacho, 1st Place

Dramatic Interpretation
Angela Cruz, 1st Place
Yu Jin Lee, 2nd Place
Jasmine Gortayo, 4th Place

Story Telling
Yu Jin Lee, 1st Place
Rebekah Kim, 5th Place

NFL 9TH-12TH GRADE

Impromptu Speech
Terrence Ho, 1st Place

Original Oratory
Angela Mamaril, 1st Place
Glenn Paul Florendo, 3rd Place

Dramatic Interpretation
Dong Ha Lee, 2nd Place

Duo Interpretation
Terrence Ho, 2nd Place
Jenica Smithee, 2nd Place

Poetry Reading
Jenica Smithee, 4th Place
Dong Ha Lee, 5th Place

Story Telling
Jimaela Ham, 3rd Place

Expository Speech
Glenn Paul Florendo, 3rd Place

U.S. Extemporaneous Speech
Yong Koo Kim, 4th Place

Green Meadow School students shine again at PGFC

Students of Green Meadow School that participated in the forensic competition at San Antonio Elementary School on April 21, 2012, once again made manifest their preparedness, dedication and skill with outstanding performances.

GMS first and second graders performed extremely well by posting a number of major honors in Dramatic Interpretation, Duo Interpretation, Choral Speaking and Readers Forum. Contestants in the 3-5 Division likewise did very well. K5 contestants Ariel Allysa Legaspi and Daniel Nicole Sacramento did exceptionally well in the final rounds.

Students of Green Meadow School that participated in the forensic competition at San Antonio Elementary School on April 21, 2012, show off their ribbons and medals.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

SEMI-FINALS AND FINALS

K-2 DIVISION:
1ST Place, Dramatic Interpretation: Jill Ann Mallari, 1st grade
1ST Place, Duo Interpretation: Kezia Arugay and Cloe Lagmay, 1st grade
3RD Place, Readers Forum: Rownel Jody Coloma, 2nd grade
3RD Place, Choral Speaking: Rayven Daca, Rownel Jody Coloma, Joshua Alfred, Rian Cadag and Aljanah Manabat, 2nd grade
4TH Place, Choral Speaking: Raphael Christian Galang, Lyndon Digno, Christian Ted Pamintuan, Keith Villasin and Christian Bhert Daniel, 1st grade
5TH Place, Readers Forum: Joshua Alfred, 2nd grade

3-5 DIVISION:
4TH Place, Humorous Interpretation: En Ming Cacdac, 5th grade
5th Place, Duo Interpretation: Ashley Reganit and Kimvherly dela Cruz, 4th grade

FINALISTS

K-2 Division:
Dramatic Interpretation: Angeline Norcio, 2nd grade
Humorous Interpretation: Ariel Allysa Legaspi, K5
Duo Interpretation: Rayven Daca and Aljanah Manabat, 2nd grade

3-5 Division:
Dramatic Interpretation: Pionnah Rosej Gregorio, 5th grade
Humorous Interpretation: En Ming Cacdac, 5th grade
Duo Interpretation: Mikee Mame Mendoza and Christian Dean Palattao, 3rd grade
Duo Interpretation: Gabrielle Shanikka Flores and Anniea Saturno, 5th grade
Duo Interpretation: Ian Willard Ranin and Art Vincent Alfeche, 4th grade
Duo Interpretation: Ashley Reganit and Kimvherly Ann Dela Cruz, 4th grade
Choral Speaking: Kristina Jane Crisostomo, Mikee Mame Mendoza, Aldraine Angelo Galang, Miles Gregory Navarro, and Christian Dean Palattao, 3rd grade
Choral Speaking: Pionnah Rosej Gregorio, En Ming Cacdac, Gabrielle Shanikka Flores, Robin Reyes, and Anniea Saturno, 5th grade
Choral Speaking: Ashley Reganit, Kimvherly Ann Dela Cruz, and Art Vincent Alfeche, 4th grade
Choral Speaking: Ian Willard Ranin, Robin Agbayani, and Miguel Mallari, 4th grade

3-5 Division: Semifinals:
Humorous Interpretation: Kristina Jane Crisostomo, 3rd grade
Humorous Interpretation: En Ming Cacdac, 5th grade
Humorous Interpretation: Miguel Mallari, 4th grade
Humorous Interpretation: Robin Agbayani, 4th grade

K-2 Division: Semifinals:
Choral Speaking: Kyna Sales, Angeline Faith Cacdac, Leunyce Regalado, Jazmyn Lopez, and Cloe Lagmay, 1st grade
Duo Interpretation: Ariel Allysa Legaspi and Danielle Nicole Sacramento, K5
Duo Interpretation: Rayven Daca and Aljanah Manabat, 2nd grade
Duo Interpretation: Keith Villasin and Kyna Sales, 1st grade
Duo Interpretation: Leunyce Regalado and Lyndon Digno, 1st grade
Dramatic Interpretation: Angeline Faith Cacdac, 1st grade
Dramatic Interpretation: Angeline Norcio, 2nd grade
Humorous Interpretation: Ariel Allysa Legaspi, K5
Humorous Interpretation: Raphael Christian Galang, 1st grade
Humorous Interpretation: Jill Anne Mallari, 1st grade
Reader's Forum: Rownel Jody Coloma, 2nd grade
Reader's Forum: Christian Ted Pamintuan, 1st grade

Life & Style

John Cusack makes a lively defense of his Poe in 'The Raven'

By ROGER MOORE
MCCLATCHY-TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

ORLANDO, Fla.—John Cusack has heard the sniping. He's Internet savvy, a big-time Twitter user. So he knew Edgar Allan Poe fanatics were complaining about the movie he was making about the writer. He knows the early reviews of "The Raven," in which he plays the poet/ thriller writer as a haunted man on the trail of a serial killer, haven't been kind.

"Poe probably deserved better than this movie which turns his heritage into a sub 'Se7en'-style serial killer thriller," sniffed Britain's Birmingham Post. But Cusack isn't taking that lying down.

"Somebody I've read said, 'Oh, he wasn't some heroic man of action.' And I go, 'Oh really? He went to West Point. He was kicked out, but he was there. He got in. And he was a swimmer. It's not a stretch to think of him trying to solve a mystery, a series of crimes. He had an analytical, mathematical mind. You can see that in the writing. He called it 'rationation.' But basically, he invented forensics in his fiction."

And Cusack is just getting started. An actor fond of finding the dark side in light characters and bringing lightness to the dark ones, Cusack found Poe to be right up his alley. At 45, Cusack has lived his movie-making life by making more interesting choices than commercial ones. He's just hoping filmgoers get into Poe the way he got into the author of "The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Raven" and "The Cask of Amontillado"—the 19th century author who popularized the short story, invented the thriller, detective fiction and, some say, science fiction. "The Raven," directed by James McTeigue ("V For Vendetta"), re-imagines Poe's last days and the mystery surrounding his death.

"I loved the conceit, here," Cusack says. "Poe getting caught up in one of his stories, trapped by a fan who is mimicking the murders in his work.

"He wrote about gruesome crimes ... And he wrote about people going mad, as in 'The Tell-Tale Heart.'" The movie acknowledges Poe's mental state, but makes note of his scathing wit and wicked wordplay.

"He was on the verge of madness, a lot of the time. He was a poet who wanted to understand death, walked around graveyards, wanted to scare the hell out of himself. What a crazy, wonderful character to play."

The screenwriters for "The Raven" reference various Poe works and have the serial killer connect the murders by names, addresses and manners of death depicted in Poe's fiction. They establish a "ticking clock" element to the pursuit by borrowing plot elements from Poe's "The Premature Burial." Cusack wanted "the REAL Poe" to be as present as possible, so he pushed for quotations from the stories and Poe's own letters.

"'I could distinctly hear the sound of darkness as it stole over the horizon,'" Cusack says, noting a favorite line. "He revered women and every one that he loved died in his arms, coughing up blood. "'I could not love except where Death. Was mingling his with Beauty's breath.' "Poe transmuted all the tragedies of his life into his writing."

And that, Cusack argues, is what "The Raven" does.

"The real Edgar Allan Poe was acerbic, needy, loved his wife and adored being adored. He was very aware of being famous.

"He was a paradox, a larger-than-life figure who was a whole lot of things at once. He certainly wasn't just a melancholy, inward-looking and intense artist. He was a man, too. We wanted to show a lot of facets to the man."

And some Poe fan film critics are buying into that, praising its "literate script, atmospheric direction, some suitably grisly murder sequences and a superb performance from John Cusack." (ViewLondon)

Whatever others read into the film, Cusack says he "never saw it as some lame attempt at turning this guy into an action hero. Seriously, if you like Poe, if you know something about this frail, vain, but also courageous, pioneering writer, I think you'll see we did justice to him."

LARRY HORRICKS/MCT
John Cusack stars in Relativity Media's gothic thriller "The Raven."

Prosecutors open with Hudson at murder trial

CHICAGO (AP)—The trial of the man accused of killing Jennifer Hudson's family opened with the marquee witness, as prosecutors put the award-winning actress and singer on the stand Monday for sometimes-tearful testimony that may well leave a lasting impression on jurors.

Hudson, wearing a simple all-black dress, broke down at one point, stopping to dab her tears and regain her composure, as she testified just yards from her former brother-in-law who prosecutors say killed her mother, brother and 7-year-old nephew in a horrific act of vindictiveness against Husdon's sister four years ago.

To the surprise of many observers, Hudson, the 2004 "American Idol" finalist and 2007 Oscar winner for her role in "Dreamgirls," was the first witness called after a prosecutor and defense attorney for William Balfour finished their opening statements. She had no testimony about shootings themselves but offered moving testimony about her family, including her reaction to her sister, Julia Hudson, telling her in 2006 she was marrying Balfour.

"None of us wanted her to marry him," Hudson said, her voice cracking and struggling to hold back tears. "We did not like how he treated her," she said.

Asked later if she was ever friends with Balfour, whom she knew from junior high school, Hudson answered with disgust.

"Never," she said firmly. "I tried to keep my distance from William Balfour."

Putting the star on the stand first was a shrewd move by prosecutors, according to one former federal prosecutor.

"It rivets the jury," said Phil Turner, a Chicago attorney. "For better or worse it increases the importance of the case in jurors' minds."

AP
In this courtroom sketch, singer and actress Jennifer Hudson testifies Monday, April 23, 2012, in Chicago at the murder trial of William Balfour, charged in the October 2008 killings of her mother, brother and nephew.

Judge Charles Burns has instructed jurors to set aside any sympathy for Hudson, but Turner said her presence is sure to be noted. And Hudson can now sit through the rest of the trial, in full view of the jury. Witnesses typically are not allowed to watch trials until they have testified, Turner said.

"Now the jury knows everything about her and that she's in the courtroom only accentuates that this is an important case," he said.

When Hudson's sister, Julia Hudson, testified later in the day about her ex-husband's alleged threats against her family, Jennifer Hudson was watching from a fourth-row bench, clutching a pink bag of tissues. She bowed her head and wiped away tears as prosecutors played a recording of the 911 call her sister made after discovering their mother's bloodied body.

"Oh my God, oh my God," Julia Hudson is heard yelling at a dispatcher, who tells her to stop screaming because he can't understand her. "My momma, my momma!"

Balfour has pleaded not guilty to three counts of first-degree murder in the October 2008 slayings.

A silver and black .45-caliber pistol prosecutors allege is the murder weapon lay on the prosecutor's table not far from where Jennifer Hudson was sitting for much of the day.

With her hair up in a bun, Hudson at first seemed composed as a prosecutor began asking her questions and even as she leaned around the judge's bench to identify Balfour. But the testimony became increasingly difficult, and she began crying when talking about seeing her family the Sunday before the killings and later when a prosecutor showed her a picture of her mother.

Competitiveness drives Stephanopoulos at ABC

NEW YORK (AP)—George Stephanopoulos doesn't really get days off. He gets hours.

The co-host of ABC's "Good Morning America" during the week and host of the Sunday political talk show "This Week" has both shows at such competitive crossroads this spring that his bosses are reluctant to give him time off.

"GMA" snapped the "Today" show's 852-week winning streak the week before last, an event that set off parties at ABC (and a congratulatory steak and chocolate cake at the Stephanopoulos household). "This Week" is also slowly gaining ground lost in the ratings when Stephanopoulos was replaced at that show by Christiane Amanpour in 2010.

Stephanopoulos

"For him, it's a win-win," said one of those bosses, ABC News executive Jon Banner. "He gets a lot of experiences and is able to dig into what he loves in bits and pieces every day of the week. And try to see his family at some points in between."

It's not a schedule built for the long term, but it's made him the man of the moment at ABC News.

Stephanopoulos compartmentalizes. He's in before dawn on weekdays to prepare for "Good Morning America," and is on the air between 7 a.m. and 9 a.m. Then he takes some time off, maybe goes to the gym. His afternoons are spent on political reporting for "World News" and lining up Sunday guests. Friday afternoon is his time of intense study for "This Week," although that usually spills into Saturdays. Sunday is the show.

Oddly enough, only a small number of ABC viewers are aware of this schedule.

"In the last three months, I've had all these people come up to me on the street and say, 'I'm so glad you're back at ABC,'" Stephanopoulos said. "That's the Sunday audience. My (weekday) morning audience has no idea that I'm on on Sunday. It's just different worlds. The overlap is very small."

He freely admits he would not be able to handle both jobs if "This Week" hadn't moved the bulk of its operations from Washington to New York since he took over in January.

The idea of moving one of the Sunday public affairs shows out of Washington would have once seemed highly controversial, yet ABC achieved it with hardly anyone noticing. Competitors "Meet the Press" on NBC and "Face the Nation" on CBS remain in Washington. The "This Week" discussion roundtable, which on Sunday included Keith Olbermann, is done in New York. Technology enables Stephanopoulos to conduct interviews remotely. "It doesn't matter where you do the show," Banner said.

ABC's Sunday viewership is up 11 percent over last year, the Nielsen company said. In an election year, "Meet the Press" (9 percent) and "Face the Nation" (7 percent) are up, too.

Underwood, Miranda Lambert lead CMT nominations

Lambert

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP)—With Carrie Underwood, Miranda Lambert and Taylor Swift atop the list, look no further than the CMT Music Awards nominations for proof country music's new favorite color is blonde.

Underwood earned five nominations, Lambert has four as a solo artist and as part of her trio Pistol Annies, and Swift led a contingent of stars earning three nominations apiece for the 11th annual video awards show. Nominations were announced Monday morning on the "Today" show.

Other artists with three nominations include Jason Aldean, Lady Antebellum, Rascal Flatts, Blake Shelton, Thompson Square and The Civil Wars.

Underwood's "Good Girl" and her "Remind Me" collaboration with Brad Paisley, Lambert's "Over You" and Swift's collaboration with The Civil Wars on "The Hunger Games" soundtrack entry "Safe & Sound" are among the 10 nominees for top honor video of the year. Underwood also is up for female video, CMT performance and collaborative video of the year.

Lambert is up for female video as a solo artist and for group video and breakthrough video for "Hell on Heels" with her friends Angaleena Presley and Ashley Monroe in Pistol Annies.

Other video of the year nominees include Aldean's "Dirt Road Anthem," Kenny Chesney's "You and Tequila" with Grace Potter, Toby Keith's "Red Solo Cup," Lady Antebellum's "We Owned the Night," Rascal Flatts' "Easy" with Natasha Bedingfield and Shelton's "God Gave Me You."

Fan voting for the awards begins Monday on the network's website and runs through June 4. The show will air live June 6 from Nasvhille.

'Avengers' hits big screen with a blast

By CHRISTY LEMIRE
AP MOVIE CRITIC

"Marvel's The Avengers"
- **Walt Disney Pictures and Paramount Pictures**
- **PG-13 for intense sequences of sci-fi violence**
- **Running time: 143 minutes**
- ★ ★ ★ ½

The hype has been building for years and it couldn't possibly be more deafening at this point.

After a series of summer blockbusters that individually introduced Iron Man, The Incredible Hulk, Thor and Captain America, all these characters come together alongside several other friends and foes in "Marvel's The Avengers."

And with director and co-writer Joss Whedon, they couldn't be in better hands. He's pulled off the tricky feat of juggling a large ensemble cast and giving everyone a chance to shine, of balancing splashy set pieces with substantive ideology. Stuff gets blown up real good in beautifully detailed 3-D in "The Avengers"—the area in and around Grand Central Terminal, for example, gets obliterated beyond recognition in an exhausting, climactic battle—but the film as a whole is never a mess from a narrative perspective.

Whedon keeps a tight rein on some potentially unwieldy material, and the result is a film that simultaneously should please purists (one of which he is) as well as those who aren't necessarily comic-book aficionados. He also stays true to the characters while establishing a tone that's very much his own. As he did with the recent horror hit "The Cabin in the Woods," which he co-wrote and produced, Whedon has come up with a script that's cheeky and breezy, full of witty banter and sly pop-culture shout-outs as well as self-referential humor, one that moves with an infectious energy that (almost) makes you lose track of its two-and-a-half-hour running time.

The back-and-forth between Robert Downey Jr.'s glib Iron Man and Chris Evans' old-school Captain America is electric, while Downey's more low-key, philosophical exchanges with Mark Ruffalo's Hulk help give the film some intellectual heft. Actually, Downey damn near runs away with this whole thing, a tough feat to pull off in a cast full of personalities who are literally larger than life; it just goes to show once again how irresistibly charismatic he can be with the right kind of writing.

But the film's vibe is never smug or off-putting; these are still comic book heroes full of all the torment and introspection you'd expect. And for a movie that's violent as hell, "The Avengers" ends up being an earnest plea for peace. As in the best of its predecessors, the original "Iron Man" from 2008, it's a reminder that a summer blockbuster can be glossy and entertaining but still have meatier matters on its mind.

MOVIE REVIEW

And we haven't even gotten to the plot yet: It's your basic bad-guy-wants-to-take-over-the-world kinda thing. But even Whedon seems to recognize what a hackneyed premise that is, so he has a little fun with it.

The preening, effete Loki (Tom Hiddleston), the bitter brother of hunky demigod Thor (Chris Hemsworth), descends to Earth from Asgard, which still has a distinctly `70s cheesiness about its twinkly sci-fi aesthetic. Once here, he steals the Tesseract, the cosmic blue cube that gives its bearer unlimited power, or some such.

The no-nonsense Nick Fury (Samuel L. Jackson), the head of S.H.I.E.L.D.—which had been entrusted with the safety of said cube—springs into action to reacquire it by assembling a dream team of superheroes and other sundry bad-asses with specialized skills. Nick gets help in this endeavor from his right-hand man, Agent Coulson (Clark Gregg, once again bringing some welcome deadpan humor to this outlandish scenario).

Besides Iron Man, Thor and Captain America, The Hulk's services are needed because the Tesseract exudes a radiation that will help track it, and The Hulk—despite the threat of his gigantic, green volatility—knows a little something about gamma rays. (Ruffalo, stepping into the Bruce Banner role that Eric Bana and Edward Norton played previously in the past decade, brings a sense of wry bemusement and appealing self-deprecation to this dangerous and misunderstood character.) There's also master assassin Hawkeye (Jeremy Renner) and super spy Black Widow (Scarlett Johansson).

But because these are superheroes with super powers, they also have super egos. And so a great deal of time is spent having them talk a lot of trash and square off against one another to prove who's toughest. There's Iron Man vs. Thor, Thor vs. The Hulk, Hawkeye vs. Black Widow and so on. While they might seem like filler, these showdowns allow each character to have his or her time in the spotlight, and they do build genuine tension. They also happen to represent the adolescent fantasies of every geek in the audience. So in theory, everyone's happy.

Eventually they will all have to come together for one epic battle against their shared enemy in Midtown Manhattan, home of Iron Man Tony Stark's latest dazzling architectural creation, his eponymous high-rise, and a cool place in general to stage massive movie destruction. Much of the gadgetry is cleverly detailed, as you'd expect—Tony Stark has devised stunningly efficient ways to get his metal suit on and off—but "The Avengers" is at its strongest in its quieter, simpler moments—when people are actually talking to each other.

The dialogue sparkles as brightly as the special effects; these people may be wearing ridiculous costumes but they're well fleshed-out underneath. And so in every regard, this movie truly fulfills its hype.

ENTERTAINMENT TIDBITS

Stolen Cezanne handed over to Switzerland

BELGRADE, Serbia (AP)—A Serbian police chief says a stolen Paul Cezanne painting worth (EURO)100 million ($130 million) has been handed back to Switzerland. The masterpiece by the famous French impressionist, titled "The Boy in the Red Vest," was discovered in Belgrade on April 12 after police arrested four Serbs suspected of robbing the E. G. Buhrle Collection in Zurich on Feb. 10, 2008. Serbian Interior Minister Ivica Dacic said the painting was flown Monday to Switzerland on a special flight. He says "(I) hope they guard it well" from now on. The robbery was among the biggest art thefts in Europe in recent history. The suspects were caught as they were trying to sell the painting to a Serb for a reported (EURO)3.5 million ($4.6 million).

Outer Critics Circle announce award nominations

NEW YORK (AP)—Matthew Broderick's musical "Nice Work If You Can Get It" has won a leading nine award nominations from the Outer Critics Circle. "Newsies" and "Once" got seven nods each and five went to "Follies," "Death of a Salesman," "Evita" and "Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark." The circle is made up of writers and commentators who cover New York theater for out-of-town media outlets. Nominees are taken from Broadway and off-Broadway shows. Winners will be announced May 14. Among its nominations, "Nice Work If You Can Get It" got nods for outstanding book, costumes, direction and choreography under Kathleen Marshall, set design and leading actress for Kelli O'Hara. Broderick did not get a nomination.

Marc Anthony, Marco Antonio Solis, Chayanne tour

MIAMI (AP)—Marc Anthony, Marco Antonio Solis and Chayanne are going on tour together. Anthony was on hand Monday in Miami for the announcement. The three amigos kick of their tour in the city on Aug. 3. The tour is called,"Gigant3S," a play on the Spanish word "giant." The tour has 14 dates and will end in Las Vegas. Cardenas Marketing Network is producing it. Despite their differing styles, Anthony said the musicians will weave together one show rather than presenting three mini concerts. Anthony is best known in the U.S. market not just for his popular salsa music but also for his ex, Jennifer Lopez. Their hit reality music show "Q'Viva! The Chosen" on Univision was picked up for English audiences by Fox. It features competing artists from across Latin America.

Pa. man sues 'Assassin's Creed' video games' maker

HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP)—A Pennsylvania man is suing the maker of the popular "Assassin's Creed" video game series for copyright infringement and asking a federal court to stop the release of its new installment. The Carlisle Sentinel reports that John Beiswenger of Strasburg filed the lawsuit last week. The suit alleges that the video game series is substantially similar to "Link," a novel he published in 2003. Beiswenger is seeking up to $5.25 million in damages. A spokesman for "Assassin's Creed" maker Ubisoft Entertainment said Monday that the company doesn't comment on ongoing litigation. "Assassin's Creed III" was scheduled for release later this year. Ubisoft Entertainment is headquartered in France, with a subsidiary office in San Francisco.

Gibb

Son: Robin Gibb beat the odds in waking from coma

LONDON (AP)—The son of Robin Gibb says the Bee Gees star has beaten the odds by waking from a coma just days after doctors said he may not survive.

The 62-year-old singer has advanced colorectal cancer and remains in intensive care. His doctor Andrew Thillainayagam said Gibb had recently caught pneumonia because he was weakened from chemotherapy and two operations.

His son, Robin-John Gibb, told ITV News on Monday that "they gave him an under 10 percent survival chance and he has beaten the odds ... he really is something else."

Thillainayagam said the singer is fully conscious and able to speak. He said Gibb's wife Dwina and children have been talking to him and playing music by his bedside every day.

The Bee Gees are best-known for a string of disco-era hits including "Stayin' Alive."

Sinead O'Connor cancels tour, says she is 'unwell'

NEW YORK (AP)—Sinead O'Connor says she is canceling her 2012 tour due to her bipolar disorder.

The singer made the announcement Monday in a posting on her website. She wrote that she is "very unwell" and had been advised by her doctor to not hit the road after her "very serious breakdown between December and March."

In December, O'Connor announced her split from therapist Barry Herridge after 16 days of marriage.

The Irish singer-songwriter is best known for the early 1990s hit "Nothing Compares 2 U."

Her latest album—"How About I Be Me (And You Be You)?"—was released in February. The 45-year-old says she had planned the tour because of the album's release, but was "attempting to be stronger than I actually am."

In this Feb. 8, 2012 file photo, actress Lindsay Lohan attends amfAR's New York gala benefit at Cipriani Wall Street in New York.

AP

Lindsay Lohan to play Liz Taylor in Lifetime film

NEW YORK (AP)—Lindsay Lohan will portray Elizabeth Taylor in a Lifetime film about her love affair with actor Richard Burton.

Lifetime on Monday made official a casting decision rumored for months. The network says Lohan will star in "Liz & Dick," with production set to begin in early June.

There was no mention of who will play Burton or when the film will air.

Taylor and Burton met as co-stars of the 1963 epic "Cleopatra." They fell in love as the world looked on, left their respective spouses and got married. Then they divorced, only to remarry and divorce again.

In recent years the 25-year-old Lohan has gained her own measure of notoriety. "Liz & Dick" represents a step in her attempted career comeback.

Scotty McCreery takes grounder to throat in game

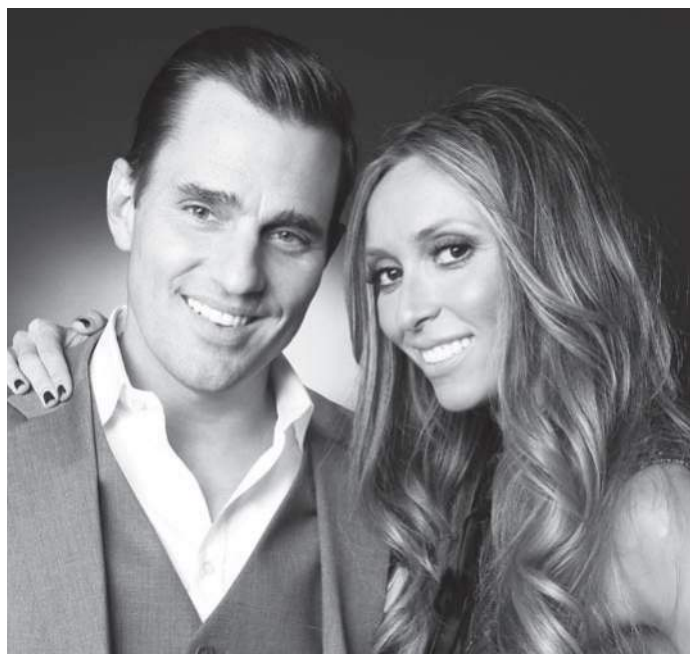
GARNER, N.C. (AP)—"American Idol" champion Scotty McCreery didn't get the win while pitching for Garner High School in his latest outing, but he apparently came away unscathed after a scary moment on the mound.

The News & Observer of Raleigh reports that the country music sensation was pitching in the third inning against East Wake High School on Thursday when a one-hopper back to the mound hit McCreery in the throat.

McCreery retrieved the ball, threw out the batter and stayed in the game. Spokeswoman Beverly Keel of Universal Music Group in Nashville says McCreery wasn't injured.

McCreery pitched 4 1/3 innings, struck out six and allowed seven hits, including a home run. He left with a 2-1 lead, but East Wake rallied for a 3-2 victory.

Giuliana and Bill Rancic are expecting a baby



AP

In this April 2, 2012 file photo, Bill and Giuliana Rancic pose for a portrait in New York. The Rancics are expecting their first child via a gestational surrogate.

NEW YORK (AP)—Giuliana and Bill Rancic are having a baby.

The child will be born later this summer via a gestational surrogate, meaning the baby will be genetically theirs but carried by another woman.

E! News first reported the news that they are expecting.

Last fall, 37-year-old Giuliana announced she had breast cancer and later underwent a double mastectomy. She did not need chemotherapy.

Giuliana is the host of E! News. Bill is a 40-year-old entrepreneur and motivational speaker who won the first season of Donald Trump's "The Apprentice."

Together, they co-star in a reality show on the Style Network called "Giuliana & Bill." Much of the show has been devoted to their fertility issues.

Daughter asks if photo album should cover all of dad's life

By ABIGAIL VAN BUREN
FROM UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE

DEAR ABBY: My father is turning 60 this year, and I want to make him a photo album with pictures from throughout his life. However, Dad is widowed and remarried, so I'm having a hard time deciding what to do with respect to my mother. They were married 25 years before she died, and they loved each other very much. They raised two children together, and she was an important part of his life.

At the same time, I have a feeling that including pictures of Mom may upset my stepmother. While I am not close with her, I don't want to intentionally hurt her feelings. What should I do?

LAURA IN ST. LOUIS

DEAR LAURA: You're asking an intelligent question and I commend you for your sensitivity. If the photo album is intended to be a surprise for your father, consider talking to your stepmother about the idea. It will give you an indication of how such a gift would be perceived by her.

■ ■ ■ ■

DEAR ABBY: I'm 24 and love my parents. Mom confided to me that she has been seeing a high school flame behind my father's back. She claims she loves this man and said she has slept with him, but she doesn't want to leave the security my father provides for her. She swore me to secrecy about her affair.

Meanwhile, my father has started talking to me about their marital problems. He doesn't understand why Mother isn't happy. I feel like I should tell him, but that would betray my mother. At the same time, not telling him what I know is betraying him. What should I do?

CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE

DEAR CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE: Your parents should not be confiding their marital difficulties to you. They should attempt to resolve them by communicating with each other—preferably with the help of a licensed marriage counselor. That your mother would turn you into a co-conspirator in her affair is despicable. Give her a deadline to level with your father or tell her that you will. He deserves to know the truth.

■ ■ ■ ■

DEAR ABBY: I have fallen in love with a very special woman. She happens to be my daughter-in-law's mother. We are very happy together, but our children are extremely upset about this. My son and her daughter no longer speak to us at this point.

I feel it's my life and I shouldn't live it for the kids, nor would I want them to live their lives for me. Is it wrong for me to be with her, or are the kids overreacting?

IN LOVE IN KENTUCKY

DEAR IN LOVE: The "kids" are overreacting, and they shouldn't be trying to blackmail the two of you into doing what they prefer. It is your life, and just as you wish your son and daughter-in-law every happiness, they should be doing the same for you. This situation is not as unusual as they think, and they should not be judging or punishing you, because you are doing nothing wrong.

■ ■ ■ ■

DEAR ABBY: I married "Darrel" six months ago. It bothers me that he wears a silver bracelet from a relationship that ended five years ago. He claims that if I were to wear a piece of jewelry from my first marriage, it wouldn't bother him as it is "just jewelry." How do you feel about this?

BOTHERED IN DAYTONA BEACH

DEAR BOTHERED: What I feel about this is not important; it's how you feel. If your husband's wearing the bracelet is a constant, irritating reminder that he was involved with someone else, he should remove it because it isn't "just jewelry" to you. And your feelings should be more important to him than the bracelet, don't cha think?

Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Write Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.

To receive a collection of Abby's most memorable—and most frequently requested—poems and essays, send your name and mailing address, plus check or money order for $7 (U.S. funds) to: Dear Abby—Keepers Booklet, P.O. Box 447, Mount Morris, IL 61054-0447. Shipping and handling are included in the price.

Pastimes

Calvin and Hobbes

By Bill Waterson

TAKE IT BACK! I'M NEVER GETTING MARRIED! NEVER!
LOVE 'EM AND LEAVE 'EM, EH? YOU RAKE!
THAT DOES IT! I'M GONNA KNOCK YOU INTO NEXT WEEK!
WAIT! WAIT! SUSIE'S COMING!
WHAT? SHE IS? AUGH! SHE IS! I'VE GOT TO DISCOURAGE ROMANCE!
YOU CAN'T! SMOLDERING PASSION IS YOUR FATE!
GOSH, CALVIN, THE DIRT COVERING YOUR FEATURES IS A BIG IMPROVEMENT.
OH NO, IT'S TRUE! I'M A LOVE MAGNET!

Garfield®

By Jim Davis

HOW ARE YOU TODAY, GARFIELD?
YOU TELL ME
AND SHE CALLS HERSELF A VETERINARIAN
JIM DAVIS 4-25
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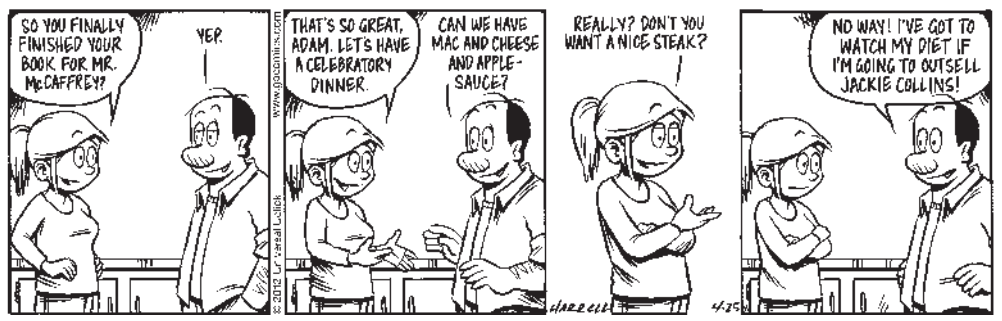
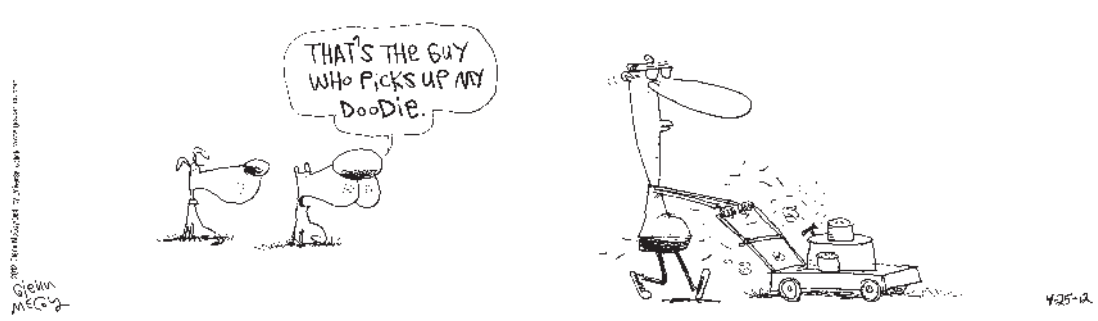
Adam@home

By Bryan Basset


SO YOU FINALLY FINISHED YOUR BOOK FOR MR. McCAFFREY?
YEP.
THAT'S SO GREAT, ADAM. LET'S HAVE A CELEBRATORY DINNER.
CAN WE HAVE MAC AND CHEESE AND APPLE-SAUCE?
REALLY? DON'T YOU WANT A NICE STEAK?
NO WAY! I'VE GOT TO WATCH MY DIET IF I'M GOING TO OUTSELL JACKIE COLLINS!
4/25

The Duplex

By Glenn McCoy



CROSSWORD

By Eugene Sheffer

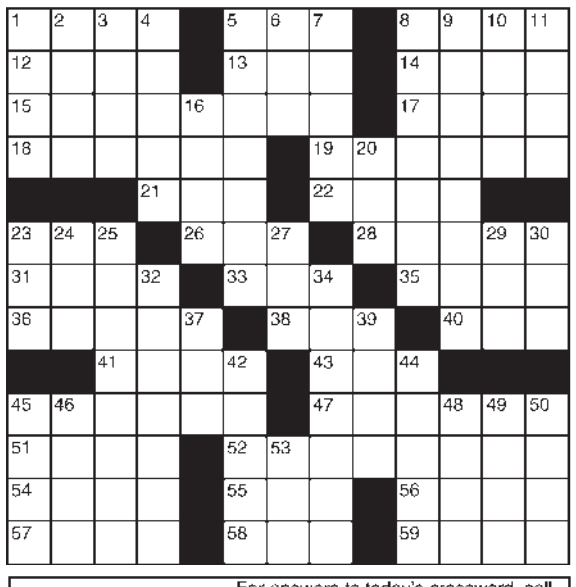
ACROSS
1 Houston acronym
5 Chic, 1960s-style
8 Greenish-blue
12 "Zounds!"
13 Bobby of hockey
14 Robust
15 Clothing
17 Vicinity
18 Son of Poseidon
19 Muffet's bugaboo
21 Umenyi-ora of the NFL
22 Back talk
23 Doo follower
26 Conclusion
28 Sordid
31 "Sad to say, ..."
33 Workout site
35 — gin fizz
36 Canoe material
38 Listener
40 Chow down
41 Conked out
43 Tit for —
45 Ball
47 One
51 Verve
52 Twenty-one, for one
54 Campus mil. grp.
55 Gorilla
56 Ms. Brocko-vich
57 Church section
58 CDs' fore-runners
59 Deterio-rates

DOWN
1 Mr. Gingrich
2 Gel in a Petri dish
3 Ganges garment
4 Supple-ment
5 Lost in thought, maybe
6 Eye, poetically
7 Frock
8 Long recliners
9 "Get rid of junk" event
10 Sheltered
11 Approach
16 Got up
20 Faux —
23 Slight touch
24 Foreman foe
25 Construc-tion pro-tections
27 Coloring agent
29 Extinct bird
30 Never-theless
32 "Nothing but per-ception," said Plato
34 Ripens
37 That woman
39 McNally partner
42 Transfer
44 "Crouch-ing —, Hidden Dragon"
45 Antitoxins
46 Drop heavily
48 Poi base
49 Send forth
50 Lairs
53 iPhone download

Solution time: 21 mins.

I	S	I	S	■	B	R	A	■	F	A	I	L
M	O	N	O	■	L	E	D	■	R	U	D	E
A	U	C	I	I	O	N	S	■	A	R	E	A
M	P	H	■	D	A	D	■	S	C	A	M	P
■	■	■	J	E	T	■	J	U	T	■	■	■
P	A	P	U	A	■	B	A	H	I	S	I	A
O	W	E	N	■	V	I	M	■	O	P	U	S
P	L	A	C	K	E	T	■	G	N	A	T	S
■	■	■	T	F	X	■	P	A	S	■	■	■
P	L	A	I	N	■	L	E	I	■	S	E	E
E	U	R	O	■	S	E	C	T	I	O	N	S
E	R	I	N	■	A	G	A	■	C	L	I	P
R	E	D	S	■	W	O	N	■	E	D	D	Y

Yesterday's answer 4-25



STUMPED? For answers to today's crossword, call **1-900-226-5955**! 99¢ per minute, touch-tone/rotary phones. (18+ only.) A King Features service, NYC.

CELEBRITIES BORN ON THIS DAY: Jason Lee, 42; Renee Zellweger, 43; Hank Azaria, 48; Al Pacino, 72.

Happy Birthday: Get serious about your future. Take what you have done in the past and market your skills to better suit the current times. You can secure a position that will allow you to make financial gains and improve your status amongst your colleagues. Praise what others accomplish, but play ruthlessly in order to get ahead. Your numbers are 6, 14, 21, 26, 30, 37, 43.

ARIES (*March 21-April 19*): Communication will enhance your love life. Discussing concerns will allow you to make the changes necessary to build a healthy and strong relationship. Interviews, sharing ideas and working alongside your peers will lead to advancement. ✪✪✪✪

TAURUS (*April 20-May 20*): Take action. You need to move forward and take on any challenge with courage and conviction. Your efforts will not go unnoticed and should help you attract the type of support you want. Networking will help you discover important knowledge. ✪✪✪

GEMINI (*May 21-June 20*): Emotional matters will surface and must be taken care of before they spin out of control. Concerns regarding personal finances will force you to make a choice that will alter the way you do things or how you live your life. ✪✪✪

CANCER (*June 21-July 22*): Don't wait for others to join in. Make constructive changes. A partnership or proposal is likely to be offered if you are progressive and productive. Once you make up your mind, stick to it, or someone will lose confidence in you. ✪✪✪

LEO (*July 23-Aug. 22*): Being stubborn will hinder you. Work out differences you have with peers or colleagues first, or you will be frowned upon. Your ideas are good, but you have to sell them with charm and prove that you are on the right track. ✪✪✪✪

VIRGO (*Aug. 23-Sept. 22*): Don't let personal matters slow you down. Focus on what's important. Learning, improving and accomplishing things that will help you advance should take top priority. Invest in the skills and services you can offer. ✪✪

LIBRA (*Sept. 23-Oct. 22*): Enjoy the company of people who share your interests. A business trip will pay off. Sign up for a course to pick up information or skills that will enable you to diversify what you have to offer. Love is in the stars. ✪✪✪✪✪

SCORPIO (*Oct. 23-Nov. 21*): Ask for advice and discuss financial options with someone you trust. You may have to work out an arrangement with someone that will enable you to cut your costs. Creative accounting and budgeting will pay off and strengthen your reputation. ✪✪✪

SAGITTARIUS (*Nov. 22-Dec. 21*): Not everyone will give you trustworthy information. Find out the facts firsthand before you make a move. Changes at home will encourage better relationships with the people you are emotionally or professionally in partnership with. ✪✪✪

EUGENIA LAST

THE LAST WORD IN ASTROLOGY

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CAPRICORN (*Dec. 22-Jan. 19*): Keep your thoughts to yourself. Impulsive statements will lead to trouble. Put energy and effort into making improvements to your surroundings and your physical and financial well-being. Action will be far more affective than words. ✪✪✪

AQUARIUS (*Jan. 20-Feb. 18*): Make a commitment to the people who count in your life. Steady progress can be made if you set guidelines that will help you stay on course until you reach the finish line. Don't set unrealistic goals. Love and romance are on the rise. ✪✪✪✪✪

PISCES (*Feb. 19-March 20*): Listen carefully and you will not make a mistake or misinterpret what's being said. It's important to understand what's expected of you and what you will get in return before you make a decision to accept or decline an offer being made. ✪✪

Birthday Baby: You are imaginative, creative and diverse. You are altruistic and scholarly.

Eugenia's Web sites: ***eugenialast.com*** *for confidential consultations,* ***myspace.com/eugenialast*** *for Eugenia's blog,* ***astroadvice.com*** *for fun*

SUDOKU

Conceptis Sudoku *By Dave Green*

			1					
		5		7				
		3				6		
		8		9		5		
	1	7				9	6	
6	5	9		4		3	8	1
		1				8		
	8	2	9		1	7	3	
7	4			8			9	5

Difficulty Level ★★★ 4/25

Sudoku is a number-placing puzzle based on a 9x9 grid with several given numbers. The object is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the same number only once. The difficulty level of the Conceptis Sudoku increases from Monday to Saturday.

Yesterday's SUDOKU Answer

4	5	6	2	3	9	1	8	7
1	3	8	7	4	5	9	6	2
7	9	2	8	1	6	3	4	5
3	7	5	6	9	1	8	2	4
6	2	9	4	8	7	5	3	1
8	1	4	3	5	2	7	9	6
2	8	7	5	6	3	4	1	9
9	6	3	1	7	4	2	5	8
5	4	1	9	2	8	6	7	3

Difficulty Level ★★

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WONDERWORD®

By DAVID OUELLET

HOW TO PLAY: All the words listed below appear in the puzzle — horizontally, vertically, diagonally, even backward. Find them and **CIRCLE THEIR LETTERS ONLY. DO NOT CIRCLE THE WORD.** The leftover letters spell the Wonderword.

POSTAGE STAMPS **Solution: 8 letters**

C	S	R	S	R	E	T	T	E	L	T	C	T	L	P
O	E	O	E	S	A	H	C	R	U	P	E	O	R	M
M	C	S	U	V	E	C	A	F	M	L	C	E	I	T
M	I	O	D	V	O	R	E	E	K	A	S	L	H	L
E	F	N	U	R	E	C	D	O	L	I	I	E	V	S
M	F	D	E	N	I	N	O	D	D	T	M	L	P	R
O	O	E	D	R	T	B	I	E	A	E	A	A	E	N
R	E	L	P	N	A	R	N	R	L	C	C	V	G	D
A	V	I	O	Ⓣ	E	T	Y	N	I	K	E	I	E	E
T	I	V	P	Y	Ⓢ	S	E	R	E	N	S	P	L	X
I	R	E	R	C	P	Ⓞ	O	T	U	E	A	E	P	I
V	R	R	I	O	E	T	Ⓒ	E	D	P	U	M	O	F
E	A	M	R	T	S	U	B	J	E	C	T	Q	E	F
C	O	T	A	I	C	U	R	R	E	N	C	Y	P	A
C	A	D	H	E	S	I	V	E	X	P	R	E	S	S

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Yesterday's Answer: Ketchup

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pro se

IN THE SUPERIOR COURT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS

In Re The Matter Of The Petition To Appoint General Guardianship For:	]	**FCD GU CIVIL ACTION NO. 12-0168**
S.J.M.M.H. Minor Child,	]	**NOTICE OF HEARING**
by	]	
MARILYN DEJUMO MANALO Petitioner	]	

Notice is hereby given that the above-entitled matter is set for a hearing on May 10, 2012, at 9:30a.m. in Courtroom 217A, before Associate Judge Perry B. Inos.

Dated this 12th day of April, 2012.

Bernadita Sablan
Clerk of Court
/s/ Deputy Clerk of Court

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Saipan Tribune

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Businesses slam 'excessive' $500 fire re-inspection, $500 permit fees
Opinion
Even despots don't live forever
The flagrance of war
Focus
More US Catholics take complaints to church court
KagHS JROTC does well in
GCA's January forensic winners
Overdrive
Mustang Boss 302
a thrill to drive, but lacks the extras
Life&Style
Davis, Dujardin win lead honors at SAG awards
Mary Tyler Moore honored for lifetime achievement
Pastimes
SUDOKU
Sports
Rollers eyeing two trips to PH in 201
'King of Aces' on island through January
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Saipan Tribune also offers a Super Saver Package—a complete 6-day run on both print and online edition, for as low as $27 for garage sales, apartment rentals, help wanted, auto and more. You can choose from any of the packages below.

ADS	(PRINT)	COMBO (PRINT AND ONLINE)
• 3-Liner	$15	$27
• 5-Liner	$24	$39
• 3-Liner with picture	$24	$42
• 5-Liner with picture	$36	$57

ADVERTISING DEADLINE

Classified Ads

Ads must be submitted before 12 noon 2 days prior to publication date

Saturday Issue:
- All ads placed Friday before 12 noon will come out Saturday issue and anything placed thereafter will be published on Monday issue.

CANCELLATION

Classified Ads

Cancellations should be made before 12 noon of the day prior to date of publication.

REFUNDS

Refunds will only be made if cancellation deadlines are met. No refunds will be made once ad is already printed.

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Saipan Tribune will not be responsible for errors after the first day of publication. Errors should be called in before noon of the issue date. *Saipan Tribune* reserves the right to place ads under proper headings and to revise copy when necessary.

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All advertising in the *Saipan Tribune* are subject to applicable rate sheet, copies of which are available from the Advertising Sales Department (please call 235-8747, 235-2769 or 235-6397). All ads will be subject to approval prior to publication. We reserve the right to edit, refuse, reject or cancel any ad at any time. Also, *Saipan Tribune* reserves the right to place ads under proper headings and to revise copy when necessary.

WHATZIT?™

Find the familiar phrase, saying or name in this arrangement of letters.

Find today's solution in classified section

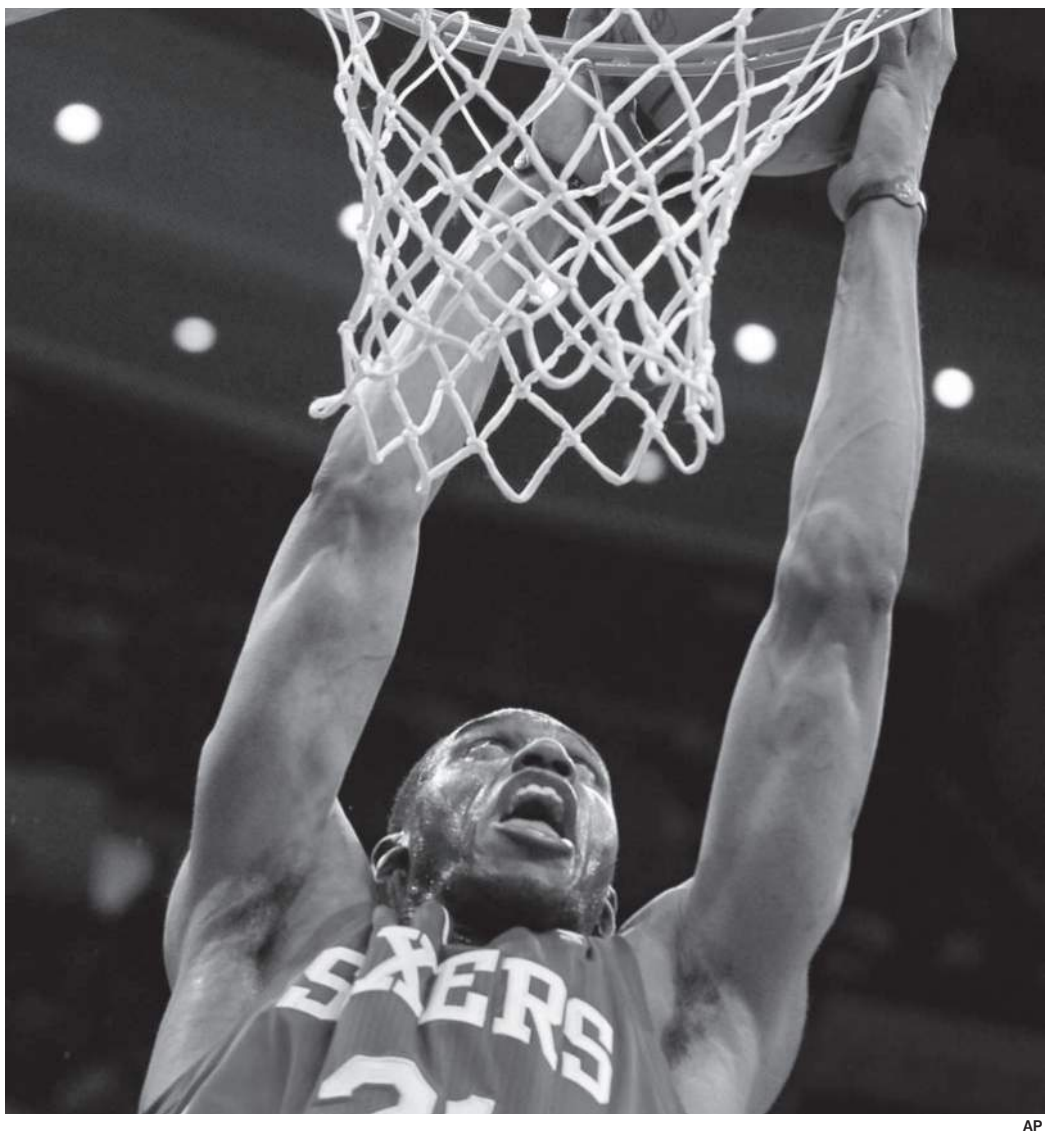
76ers make playoffs for 2nd straight season

NEWARK, New Jersey (AP)—Philadelphia secured the final playoff berth in the Eastern Conference and spoiled the Nets' final game in New Jersey, 105-87 Monday night.

Thaddeus Young scored all 15 of his points in the second half to help the 76ers make the postseason for the second straight year and eliminate the Milwaukee Bucks from playoff contention.

Jrue Holiday and Elton Brand added 15 points apiece and Andre Iguodala had 14 points and nine assists for Philadelphia.

MarShon Brooks had 18 points to lead the Nets, who will move into a new arena in Brooklyn next season.



AP

Philadelphia 76ers' Thaddeus Young (21) goes up for a shot against the New Jersey Nets in the fourth quarter of an NBA basketball game, Tuesday, April 10, 2012, in Newark, N.J.

Spurs 124, Trail Blazers 89

In San Antonio, Tim Duncan and Danny Green both scored 18 points as San Antonio clinched the top playoff spot in the Western Conference and pushed their winning streak to eight.

Wesley Matthews had 24 points for Portland, which lost its sixth straight and has one game left in a tumultuous season.

The Spurs secured the top seed with a second-half surge, winning 22 of their last 25 games.

J.J. Hickson had 14 points and 10 rebounds for the injury-depleted Trail Blazers who again only used nine players.

Wizards 101, Bobcats 73

In Washington, John Wall had 16 points and 14 assists, Nene scored 18 points and Jan Vesely had 16 points on 8-for-8 shooting as Washington handed Charlotte its 21st straight loss.

The Wizards have their first four-game winning streak since Dec. 9-13, 2007. The 28-point margin of victory equaled their largest in the season.

The Bobcats were competitive for most of the first quarter until Charlotte's Tyrus Thomas was ejected with 3.6 seconds left for throwing an elbow at Washington's James Singleton. He was assessed a flagrant 2 foul. Singleton made two free throws.

Gerald Henderson had 19 points for the Bobcats, while D.J. Augustin added 15.

If Charlotte (7-57) loses its final two games, they will finish with the worst winning percentage in NBA history. They play at Orlando on Wednesday and at home Thursday night against New York.

Pacers 103, Pistons 97

In Indianapolis, Paul George scored 12 of his 27 points in the fourth quarter as Indiana downed Detroit.

George made 13 of 15 free throws and grabbed 10 rebounds for the Pacers. David West scored 20 points and Leandro Barbosa and Tyler Hansbrough added 13 points each for Indiana.

Pacers coach Frank Vogel rested regular starters Danny Granger, Roy Hibbert and George Hill since Indiana is locked into the No. 3 seed in the Eastern Conference playoffs.

Greg Monroe scored 18 points, Brandon Knight had 16 and Tayshaun Prince added 14 for the Pistons.

Detroit held the Pacers to 38 percent shooting, but Indiana forced 18 turnovers and outrebounded the Pistons 56-42.

Grizzlies 109, Cavaliers 101

In Memphis, Tennessee, Marreese Speights had 17 points and 10 rebounds, and Marc Gasol also scored 17 points as Memphis won its fifth straight game.

Rudy Gay scored 15 points, O.J. Mayo had 14, Tony Allen added 13 points and a franchise-record eight steals for the Grizzlies, who won their 10th straight at home. Gay and Mayo led a rally that allowed Memphis to finally put the game away in the closing minutes.

The Grizzlies pulled one-half game behind the Los Angeles Clippers for fourth place in the Western Conference and homecourt advantage in the first round of the playoffs. The Clippers hold the tiebreaker between the teams.

Rookie Kyrie Irving had 25 points on 10-for-16 shooting for Cleveland, which lost its fifth in its last six games.

Bucks 92, Raptors 86

In Milwaukee, the Bucks are out of the NBA playoffs, despite getting 25 points from Brandon Jennings in a victory over Toronto.

Milwaukee's postseason fate was determined earlier Monday night when Philadelphia beat New Jersey to clinch the eighth playoff berth in the Eastern Conference and eliminate the Bucks.

Ersan Ilyasova added 19 points and 15 rebounds for Milwaukee.

James Johnson had 22 points and 13 rebounds for the Raptors, who have lost four straight games.

World Peace faces NBA *discipline for violent elbow to Harden*

LOS ANGELES (AP)—The Lakers jersey says World Peace on the back. The player wearing it is still Ron Artest, and he's in trouble again with the NBA.

Metta World Peace was pounding his chest with his right arm in celebration of a dunk over two opponents Sunday when his left arm suddenly flew out, landing a vicious backward elbow to James Harden's head and dropping the Oklahoma City guard to the hardwood.

Within seconds, the roars of the crowd fell silent as fans watched in disbelief the latest act of violence by a player who changed his name last year to promote peace.

World Peace is likely to be sidelined when the Lakers open the postseason this weekend, and possibly longer. He claims he accidentally clipped Harden while celebrating a dunk, yet given his history as perhaps basketball's most notorious troublemaker since Dennis Rodman, not even his teammates have any idea why he lost control for an inexplicable instant.

"It was unfortunate that James had to get hit with an unintentional elbow," World Peace said. "I hope he's OK."

World Peace undid much of the goodwill created by his notable charity work over the past few years when he knocked Oklahoma City's top reserve out of the key late-season game, giving him a concussion.

His upcoming suspension will be just a fraction of the 86-game ban Artest received in November 2004 when he jumped into the stands at the Palace of Auburn Hills to fight fans, precipitating perhaps the ugliest brawl in North American sports history.

Yet World Peace changed more than his name over the past three years with the Lakers. The former math major from St. John's has devoted much of his free time to charity, even winning the NBA's J. Walter Kennedy Citizenship Award last April, primarily for his work in mental health awareness.

"One play in the heat of a battle, all of the sudden it changes his perception as a man and as a person? No," said Kobe Bryant, his teammate and tireless defender. "Everybody, all you guys, know what a sweet guy he is."

While the NBA's top brass watched video of the elbow and debated the length of a suspension Monday, sports fans debated whether to give Peace another chance. Some saw his actions as an ill-timed celebration that accidentally hurt a player standing too close, while others thought the Lakers forward should be suspended indefinitely, perhaps even banned from the NBA for a dangerous lack of impulse control.

"During that play, I just dunked on (Kevin) Durant and (Serge) Ibaka, and I got really emotional and excited," World Peace said in a 30-second statement afterward, refusing to take questions in the Lakers' locker room. "The Thunder, they're playing for a championship this year, so I hope that he's OK, and I apologize to the Thunder and to James Harden. You know, it was such a great game, and it was unfortunate so much emotion was going on at that time."

The prolific tweeter gave a bit more insight about the elbow later that night.

"I just watched the replay again," World Peace tweeted. "Oooo.. My celebration of the dunk really was too much... Didn't even see James ..... Omg... Looks bad."

No matter what the NBA does to World Peace, his rebuilt image has taken another big blow. His actions also added a layer of irony to his decision last September to change his name, including a first name he claims is a traditional Buddhist term denoting kindness and friendliness.

Until World Peace leveled Harden with what appeared to be a precise elbow to the head in a key game for both teams' playoff plans, some fans might have nearly forgotten the image of Artest throwing punches at a fan in the Detroit suburbs 7 1/2 years ago, mistakenly thinking that fan had thrown a drink at him while he played for the Indiana Pacers.

While Harden rolled in agony on the floor, his teammates confronted World Peace, who appeared ready to fight Ibaka. World Peace then spoke with the officials, appearing to mime an argument that he had simply been celebrating with a chest-pound that missed its target, before they ejected him for a flagrant foul.

"Him getting ejected could have really hurt us," Bryant said after the Lakers rallied from an 18-point deficit for a double-overtime victory over the Thunder. "In that sense, he's really going to have to control himself and pay attention in those moments where he doesn't erupt too much."

Even opponents are divided in their opinions on the NBA veteran. Oklahoma City big man Kendrick Perkins spoke in defense of World Peace, saying he would never intentionally harm another player, while superstar Kevin Durant was more cautious.

"I couldn't really get a good look at it," Durant said. "I'm just happy my teammate is all right. It was a bad play. Hopefully, Ron didn't do it intentionally or have any malicious intentions on that."

World Peace's two sides are difficult to reconcile, even for the player himself. He grew up around violence and gang activity in Queensbridge projects of Queens, New York, but excelled in college before becoming an NBA All-Star and the league's top defensive player in 2004. He has acknowledged drinking during games early in his career, and he rewarded the Pacers for their patience with his 2004-05 suspension by demanding a trade shortly after he returned.

Yet World Peace appears to have his life on track in Los Angeles, where he signed as a free agent in 2009. Six months after he famously thanked his psychiatrist when he scored 20 points in the Lakers' victory over Boston in Game 7 of the 2010 NBA finals, Artest even raffled off his championship ring, raising $65,000 for mental health causes.

"There's been ups and downs, a real roller-coaster ride, but this is one of the times you look back and say it was all worth it," Artest said last year after winning the Kennedy award as the NBA's best citizen. "Everything I've been through has made me who I am today."

An extended suspension for World Peace would harm the Lakers, likely headed to the postseason as the No. 3 seed in search of the franchise's 17th NBA title. World Peace usually defends their opponents' top swingman while providing intermittent offense, including 12 points before he was ejected.

Any lengthy absence for Harden could be an even bigger problem for Oklahoma City, which will be seeded ahead of Los Angeles and could meet the Lakers in the second round. The Thunder have designs on a championship run, and the heavily bearded Harden is their most important reserve.

"It was a bad play, there is no way around it," said Oklahoma City coach Scott Brooks, who coached Artest as an assistant during the 2006-07 season in Sacramento. "It was a dangerous play. It's not a play that should be involved in basketball. I know Ron. Unfortunately, it did happen, but you can't do that. It's unacceptable."

Bumgarner, Giants beat Mets for doubleheader sweep

AP

San Francisco Giants' Madison Bumgarner pitches during the first inning of the second baseball game of a doubleheader against the New York Mets on Monday, April 23, 2012, in New York.

NEW YORK (AP)—Madison Bumgarner pitched seven neat innings and Pablo Sandoval homered to match a team mark set by Willie Mays as the San Francisco Giants beat the New York Mets 7-2 Monday for a doubleheader sweep.

The Giants took the opener 6-1 as Tim Lincecum posted his first win of the season despite another uneven performance.

Slightly over 1,000 fans bundled up in the stands when the opener began on a windy, raw afternoon better suited for the Bay Area. The crowd later picked up, but Citi Field was nearly empty for the final out. A rainout Sunday forced the twinbill.

Sandoval hit a three-run homer in the first inning to back Bumgarner. The burly slugger has a 16-game hitting streak, tying the San Francisco record at the start of a season set by Mays in 1960, STATS LLC said.

Cubs 3, Cardinals 2

In Chicago, Joe Mather's two-run single with two outs in the ninth inning lifted Chicago to a comeback win over St. Louis.

St. Louis closer Jason Motte (1-1) had the Cubs down to their final strike when Mather, a former Cardinal, grounded a 2-2 slider up the middle, scoring Bryan LaHair and Geovany Soto.

LaHair battled Motte for 12 pitches before drawing a one-out walk. Motte then walked Soto, before Steve Clevenger's grounder moved the runners up to set the plate for Mather.

Rafael Dolis (1-1) picked up the win in relief.

Brewers 6, Astros 5

In Milwaukee, Ryan Braun broke out of his slump with a homer and three hits and Zack Greinke remained unbeaten at Miller Park as Milwaukee held off Houston.

Braun also singled in a run and doubled to end a 2-for-20 slide. Greinke pitched six solid innings to improve to 13-0 at home with Milwaukee, which won its 10th straight against the Astros.

Greinke (2-1) handed Jose Veras a 6-2 lead to start the seventh, but five of the next six Astros batters reached base. Houston scored three runs on four hits, including Brian Bogusevic's two-run triple, before Veras struck out Jose Altuve and got pinch-hitter Matt Downs to ground out to end the inning.

Diamondbacks 9, Phillies 5

In Phoenix, Justin Upton burst out of a slow start to the season with two RBIs, including his first home run, as Arizona downed Philadelphia.

Left-handed pitcher Wade Miley, starting in place of injured Daniel Hudson, stifled the Phillies on two hits through six scoreless innings. Philadelphia's Kyle Kendrick (0-1), replacing the injured Cliff Lee, lasted just three innings plus one batter, allowing seven runs and 11 hits.

Jason Kubel homered and doubled twice, tying a career best with three hits. Miley (2-0) struck out seven and walked one in his first start of the season.

Philadelphia scored all five runs in the ninth inning, including a three-run homer by Shane Victorino and Carlos Ruiz's solo shot.

Dodgers 7, Braves 2

In Los Angeles, Juan Uribe tied a career high with four hits and drove in three runs, and Chris Capuano pitched out of trouble for seven innings to lead Los Angeles over Atlanta.

A.J. Ellis had a pair of RBI singles and Capuano (2-0) allowed a run, six hits and four walks while striking out five, helping the Dodgers improve to an NL-best 13-4. The left-hander needed 27 pitches to get out of the first inning unscathed, striking out Jason Heyward on a full count with the bases loaded.

Capuano escaped another jam in the fourth, retiring leadoff man Michael Bourn on a grounder with two runners in scoring position.

Uribe had an RBI single in the first and a two-run single with the bases loaded in the eighth.

Yankees 7, Rangers 4

In Arlington, Texas, Derek Jeter had four hits to stretch his hitting streak to 13 games and Alex Rodriguez belted career home run No. 632 as the New York Yankees beat the Texas Rangers.

CC Sabathia (2-0) struck out eight over eight innings for his 11th career win against the two-time defending American League champion Rangers, who won their first five series this season.

The big left-hander was pitching with an extra day of rest after the Yankees' scheduled series finale at Boston was rained out Sunday night, a day after New York overcame a 9-0 deficit for a 15-9 win over the Red Sox.

Mariano Rivera worked a perfect ninth for his fourth save. New York has won 10 of 13 since being swept in three games at Tampa Bay to start the season.

Josh Hamilton homered for the Rangers.

Red Sox 6, Twins 5

In Minneapolis, Cody Ross homered twice, tying the game with a two-run shot in the seventh inning and giving Boston the lead with two outs in the ninth as the Red Sox beat Minnesota to snap a five-game losing streak.

Starter-turned-temporary-reliever Daniel Bard (1-2) recorded two critical outs in the eighth after the Twins put the leadoff runner on third. Alfredo Aceves picked up the save, his third in five tries, and all was right with the reeling Red Sox for at least one night.

Ross put the Red Sox in front with his drive off Matt Capps (0-1). Jon Lester allowed six hits, five runs and four walks over seven innings. He struck out four but wasted a 3-0 lead.

Blue Jays 4, Royals 1

In Kansas City, Missouri, Jose Bautista hit a two-run homer and Kelly Johnson also went deep as Toronto beat Kansas City to complete a four-game sweep.

The Blue Jays improved to 6-1 on the road this season, while Kansas City lost its 11th straight to finish up a winless 10-game homestand. The Royals became the first team to lose its first 10 at home since the Chicago Cubs dropped 12 in a row at Wrigley Field in 1994.

Eric Hosmer homered for Kansas City. Otherwise, Brandon Morrow (1-1) took care of the struggling Royals lineup for 6 2-3 innings. Francisco Cordero got some help from a double-play groundout in the ninth for his second save.

The four-game sweep was the Blue Jays' first since May 2009, and their first ever at Kansas City. The last time they swept four on the road was 2003 against the New York Yankees.

White Sox 4, Athletics 0

In Oakland, California, Jake Peavy pitched a three-hitter and Adam Dunn and Paul Konerko hit back-to-back homers as the Chicago beat Oakland.

Two days after teammate Phil Humber pitched the 21st perfect game in major league history, Peavy allowed only a leadoff single to Jemile Weeks in the fourth inning, a double to Yoenis Cespedes in the seventh and a single to Coco Crisp in the ninth. The 2007 NL Cy Young pitching award winner walked two and faced only four batters more than the minimum.

Alex Rios added three hits for Chicago, while Brent Morel had two hits and scored a run.

Oakland starter Bartolo Colon scattered seven hits over seven innings and fell short in his bid to become the first four-game winner in the majors.

Might be no written decision in Braun

NEW YORK (AP)—There may never be a written decision explaining why Ryan Braun's drug suspension was overturned.

The arbitrator who threw out the 50-game suspension of the NL MVP has been asked by the players' union and management to hold off giving his reasoning while they negotiate changes to their rules for collecting specimens, people familiar with the case told The Associated Press.

If players and owners reach agreement on the changes, the Feb. 23 decision by arbitrator Shyam Das to overturn the penalty for the Milwaukee outfielder could be allowed to stand without any written explanation, the people said, speaking on condition of anonymity because the process is designed to be confidential.

Baseball's labor contract says there should be a written decision within 30 days of an arbitrator's ruling. It appears management has no interest in a decision detailing how collection procedures weren't followed and the union has no interest in getting an explanation of a decision many believe let Braun off on a technicality.

"It's obviously disappointing because people deserve to know what the basis for the case being overturned is, and frankly the athlete should have that right as well," Travis Tygart, chief executive officer of the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency, said Monday. "Certainly an innocent athlete would want that opportunity."

Braun declined comment, Brewers spokesman Mike Vassallo said.

Meantime, the sides already have made some changes to collection procedures as a result of Das' decision.

Employees of Comprehensive Drug Testing, who take the specimens from players, are now required to drop the samples off at a Federal Express office on the same day they are collected, provided an office is open in the vicinity. If not, collectors should take the specimens home rather than leave them in a drop box. The prohibition against using drop boxes already was in the drug agreement between players and owners.

"We hope the parties step back and ensure that the rights of clean athletes and the integrity of the sport are safeguarded through the legal process," Tygart said. "It sounds like the changes are toward that effort and ultimately good for clean athletes."

Braun tested positive for a urine sample he provided at about 4:30 p.m. on Oct. 1, a Saturday and the day the Brewers opened the NL playoffs. ESPN reported the positive test in December. The collector, Dino Laurenzi Jr., left Milwaukee's Miller Park approximately 30 minutes later and followed procedures established by CDT.

While FedEx offices were open, there were none within 50 miles of Miller Park that would ship packages that day or Sunday. Laurenzi took the sealed package containing the sample home, placed it in a Rubbermaid container in his basement office and took it to a FedEx office on Monday. It was then sent to the World Anti-Doping Agency-certified lab outside Montreal.

Das heard two days of testimony in January. Braun's side argued Laurenzi violated the language of baseball's drug agreement, which states "absent unusual circumstances, the specimens should be sent by FedEx to the laboratory on the same day they are collected."

Management could challenge a written decision in federal court. However, the grounds to overturn an arbitration decision are narrow, with a side generally having to prove bias or misconduct by the arbitrator, that the arbitrator exceeded his powers or there was corruption involved in the decision.

Onoue successfully defends CWGA points title

»Togawa clinches back-to-back low gross plums

By WALTER CEPEDA SUTHERLAND
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REPORTER

Shiori Onoue edged Noriko Togawa to win her second consecutive overall points title at the conclusion of the CNMI Women's Golfers Association's two-day 5th Annual Ace of Aces season finale tournament held last April 14 and 15 at the Laolao Bay Golf Resort.

Onoue finished the season with 125 points and snuck past two-time low gross leader Togawa by just two points.

Last year's low gross runner-up Masayo Miyamoto took third place with Chang Eun Ae (91), Dolores Yamagishi (90), Yuko Togawa (89), Terry Guerrero (73), Kimiko Abe (68), Sheralyn Jones (68), and Lou Kim (61) rounding out the Top 10.

Noriko Togawa may have just missed overall points honors, but she did manage to finish ahead of Onoue by a stroke in the low gross category with a total tally of 159.

Xiao Ling Wang (167) settled for third place with Yi Su Jeong (169) and Yuko Togawa (170) rounding out the fourth and fifth spots.

Jeong came away as the low net score winner with a total count of 142. She beat runner-up Kyung Seo Ran by a stroke with Onoue (150), Yamagishi (150), and Mio Kim (151) filling out the rest of the field.

The group's season-ending awards banquet was held poolside at Laolao Bay Golf Resort after last Sunday's final round.

Established in March 2007, CWGA is a nonprofit organization founded to promote, encourage, and introduce women to the sport of golf in the CNMI.

Its organizational goals consist of promoting civic and community interest in golf; establishing and encouraging competition and good sportsmanship; promoting and providing social functions of its members and families; promoting youth golf activities; and doing all things necessary and proper to accomplish its purpose and intentions.

CWGA members also pledge to abide by a set of values that will further enrich a golfer's performance, attitude and conduct. Such values were adopted from the USA Junior Golf Association. They include perseverance, sportsmanship, respect, honesty, judgment, responsibility, reliance, courtesy and sincerity.

For more information, contact Terry Guerrero at 285-8374, Bennet Seman at 483-0126, Yuko Togawa at 287-9856 at or Delores Yamagishi at 483-3195.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO
Participants of the CNMI Women's Golfers Association's 5th Annual Ace of Aces pose at the end of the two-day season finale held at the Laolao Bay Golf Resort.

CNMI

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nedy Izuka. Completing the team are Carlson Cruzat, Alan Hinson, Christopher Aninzo, Daniel and John Auther, Julian Pellegrino, Won-Young Kim, Jeremie Tanghal, Gideon Borja, John Masga, Louie Calayag, Emmanuel Aniana, Ryu Tanzawa, Moris Villanueva, Joshua Galarion, James Ermitanio, and Wataru Takima. Kiyoshi Sekiguchi is coaching the team.

The 22 players were selected from a pool that underwent a series of tryouts for several months and they left Saipan for Beijing early Sunday morning.

"Our team is up against very good squads like North Korea, Japan, and Chinese-Taipei. These teams are tough to beat as they have been competing in AFC events for so many years. As for Mongolia, Macau, and Guam, I believe we can keep up with them as their players have less or no experience like most of our players," Sekiguchi said in an interview with *Saipan Tribune* during their final training session last Thursday at the Hopwood Junior High School Field.

"Playing against top caliber teams like Japan will give our young players the feel of competing against players with very high level skills. This is good for them, they will learn a lot from the tournament," he added.

The CNMI will not be facing Japan until this Saturday when they collide at 8:30am. Then on Sunday, the Commonwealth bets will have two games, as they duel North Korea again at 8:30am and Mongolia at 11:30am.

Before the weekend games, the CNMI U14 National team will play against China tomorrow at 11:15am and then face Guam anew at 3pm. For the Commonwealth's last game in Day 2, it will challenge Macau at 4:30pm.

COMETS

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2) has allowed 13 earned runs off 28 hits through 36 2/3 innings (nine games), improving his earned run average to 2.13.

It was a good thing for him as Atalig (2.36 ERA) is breathing down his neck with Lizama (2.87 ERA), Pua (3.03ERA), and IT&E's Mathew Kapileo (4.50 ERA) rounding out the field.

Secharmidal has also accrued a league high 82 strikeouts with Atalig (76), Pua (72), Kapileo (72), Comets' Erik Cruz (58), Lizama (57), and Saralu (40) rounding out the field.

Junior Aces' Muna pulled on his 12th hit in 18 at bats for a stout 0.667 batting average. He leads IT&E Fielders' Kainoa Wanket (0.600), Saipan Shipping Compnay-Jets K.J. Deleon Guerrero (0.577), Aces' Jessie Brel (0.556), Red Sox's Roke Tenorio (0.500), Jets' Franco Nakamura (0.483), Jones (0.458), Aces' Kenji Yamagata (0.444), Red Sox's Jerald Cabrera (0.440), and Enforcers' Caleb Takao (0.440) with two others swinging at least 0.400.

Ol'Aces' Verlance Secharmidal tops the field in RBIs with 11 and edges Nakamura (10), Deleon Guerrero (9), Muna (9) and Wanket (9).

He and Nakamura also lead the league in home runs with two apiece; eight others have one apiece.

Nakamura and Jones share the lead in triples with four each, with Secharmidal and Tenorio trailing by one and five others with two apiece.

Muna's five doubles fronts the category ahead of Jets' Ben Maratita (4), Tenorio (4), Nakamura (3), Deleon Guerrero (3), and Wanket (3).

In pitching, Jones (2-1) has allowed eight runs off 15 hits through 17 and a third innings (5 games), while Camacho (1-2) has given up just as many runs in the same amount of time on the mound over four games; both share an ERA of 3.23.

Behind them come Red Sox's Jhace Palacios (5.44 ERA) and Jets' Jason Villagomez (5.68 ERA).

Villagomez's 33 strikeouts tops the field over Aces' lefty Terson Eina (22) and Natibu Talaabwogh Falcons' J.J. Lifoifoi (22).

BUTCH

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In the short course, youth biker Erico Castro bested 27 other riders after submitting 45:42. Castro finished the race just 22 seconds ahead of runner-up Rolando Canipas, who logged 46:04. Harold Balana completed the Top 3 with his time of 48:98.

In the women's division, Joan Salazar was ahead of Lauretta Allen as the former timed in at 1:09:24 against the latter's 1:36:44.

The MTB short course had bikers going up to MCC from Mariana Resort and then to Kimikaze, Kalabera, one million gallon tank, and back to MCC.

In the beginners' course, Nestor Corotan clocked in at 28:28 to lead 13 others. Corotan and company biked from Mariana Resort up to the paved road heading to Suicide Cliff and then turned left on the road at the back of the golf course.

Joining Corotan in the Top 3 were Rustico Valino (28:36) and Jerome Diyco (28:51).

For the road race, Nap Dizon, Willy Barbo, and Regina Sebial prevailed in their respective divisions.

Dizon reigned supreme in the men's 45-and-below, timing in at 1:26:17 and beating Aldrin Sta. Ana and Ariel Garcia in a photo finish.

The men's 46-and-above division was also a neck-and-neck battle with Barbo crossing the finish line at the 1:26:54 mark, just a second ahead of Cesar Fortaleze. Renato Calage completed the Top 3 with his 1:28:41.

In the women's division, Sebial made it to the finish line at Mariana Resort at the 1:07:53 mark, about 16 minutes faster that Esther Ada (1:24:06). Other women's finishers were Marian Aldan-Pierce (1:31:25), and Juanita Fajardo (1:34:26).

The road bike course had bikers leaving Mariana Resort for Banzai Cliff and Mobil Tanapag and back to the start/finish line. Participants in the men's race did three laps of the course, while female riders made two.

EXPENSIVE

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a lot of facilities for the competition. It is offering 12 compulsory sports and 16 optional, including baseball. The winning bid will be selected in October when the Pacific Games Council holds the General Assembly in Wallis & Futuna.

Should the CNMI decide to participate in the 2019 Pacific Games, fundraising efforts must be done early. Last year, the CNMI Team just like the past years struggled for funding to the point that the Commonwealth's baseball squad almost did not make it to New Caledonia. The CNMI also sent four golfers, two runners, and two beach volleyball players in New Caledonia.

The cost for each delegate to the Pacific Games in New Caledonia was about $2,000 and the Legislature allotted $10,000 financial aid for the CNMI Team, but in the end, no funds were made available for the Commonwealth representatives.

TRIBUNE SPORTS SCORES

NBA STANDINGS

EASTERN CONFERENCE

Atlantic Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
y-Boston	37	27	.578	—
x-New York	34	30	.531	3
x-Philadelphia	34	30	.531	3
New Jersey	22	43	.338	15 1/2
Toronto	22	43	.338	15 1/2

Southeast Division

y-Miami	46	18	.719	—
x-Atlanta	38	26	.594	8
x-Orlando	36	28	.563	10
Washington	18	46	.281	28
Charlotte	7	57	.109	39

Central Division

y-Chicago	48	16	.750	—
x-Indiana	42	23	.646	6 1/2
Milwaukee	31	33	.484	17
Detroit	24	41	.369	24 1/2
Cleveland	21	43	.328	27

WESTERN CONFERENCE

Southwest Division

z-San Antonio	48	16	.750	—
x-Memphis	40	25	.615	8 1/2
x-Dallas	36	29	.554	12 1/2
Houston	33	32	.508	15 1/2
New Orleans	20	44	.313	28

Northwest Division

y-Oklahoma City	46	18	.719	—
x-Denver	36	28	.563	10
Utah	34	30	.531	12
Portland	28	37	.431	18 1/2
Minnesota	26	39	.400	20 1/2

Pacific Division

x-L.A. Lakers	41	24	.631	—
x-L.A. Clippers	40	24	.625	1/2
Phoenix	33	31	.516	7 1/2
Golden State	23	41	.359	17 1/2
Sacramento	21	43	.328	19 1/2

x-clinched playoff spot
y-clinched division
z-clinched conference

MLB STANDINGS

AMERICAN LEAGUE

East Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
New York	10	6	.625	—
Toronto	10	6	.625	—
Baltimore	9	7	.563	1
Tampa Bay	9	7	.563	1
Boston	5	10	.333	4 1/2

Central Division

Chicago	10	6	.625	—
Detroit	10	6	.625	—
Cleveland	8	6	.571	1
Minnesota	5	12	.294	5 1/2
Kansas City	3	13	.188	7

West Division

Texas	13	4	.765	—
Oakland	8	10	.444	5 1/2
Seattle	7	10	.412	6
Los Angeles	6	10	.375	6 1/2

NATIONAL LEAGUE

East Division

Washington	12	4	.750	—
Atlanta	10	7	.588	2 1/2
New York	8	8	.500	4
Miami	7	8	.467	4 1/2
Philadelphia	7	10	.412	5 1/2

Central Division

St. Louis	11	6	.647	—
Milwaukee	8	9	.471	3
Cincinnati	7	9	.438	3 1/2
Pittsburgh	6	9	.400	4
Houston	6	11	.353	5
Chicago	5	12	.294	6

West Division

Los Angeles	13	4	.765	—
San Francisco	9	7	.563	3 1/2
Colorado	8	7	.533	4
Arizona	9	8	.529	4
San Diego	5	12	.294	8

NBA LEADERS

(Through April 22)

Scoring

	G	FG	FT	PTS	AVG
Durant, OKC	64	624	413	1786	27.9
Bryant, LAL	58	574	381	1616	27.9
James, MIA	62	621	387	1683	27.1
Love, MIN	55	474	379	1432	26.0
Westbrook, OKC	64	564	326	1515	23.7
Anthony, NYK	54	434	292	1228	22.7
Aldridge, POR	55	483	223	1191	21.7
Nowitzki, DAL	61	466	311	1320	21.6
D. Williams, NJN	55	391	257	1154	21.0
Howard, ORL	54	416	281	1113	20.6
Ellis, MIL	57	446	211	1164	20.4
Griffin, LAC	64	533	235	1303	20.4
Lee, GOL	57	464	219	1147	20.1
Pierce, BOS	59	385	293	1161	19.7
Paul, LAC	59	415	250	1155	19.6
Jefferson, UTA	59	506	134	1147	19.4
Jennings, MIL	63	448	185	1204	19.1
Gay, MEM	63	473	198	1197	19.0
J. Johnson, ATL	58	406	156	1086	18.7
Smith, ATL	64	486	198	1198	18.7

FG Percentage

	FG	FGA	PCT
Chandler, NYK	239	351	.681
Howard, ORL	416	726	.573
Pekovic, MIN	248	442	.561
Gortat, PHX	422	755	.559
Bynum, LAL	444	796	.558
McGee, DEN	293	531	.552
Griffin, LAC	533	985	.541
Nash, PHX	287	537	.534
Blair, SAN	251	470	.534
James, MIA	621	1169	.531

Rebounds

	G	OFF	DEF	TOT	AVG
Howard, ORL	54	200	585	785	14.5
Love, MIN	55	226	508	734	13.3
Bynum, LAL	60	192	517	709	11.8
Humphries, NJN	61	228	441	669	11.0
Griffin, LAC	64	210	489	699	10.9
Cousins, SAC	62	256	421	677	10.9
Gasol, LAL	65	183	495	678	10.4
Gortat, PHX	64	178	459	637	10.0
Chandler, NYK	61	210	397	607	10.0
Noah, CHI	62	236	367	603	9.7

Assists

	G	AST	AVG
Rondo, BOS	52	605	11.6
Nash, PHX	60	645	10.8
Paul, LAC	59	535	9.1
Calderon, TOR	53	468	8.8
D. Williams, NJN	55	481	8.7
Rubio, MIN	41	336	8.2
Wall, WAS	63	491	7.8
Parker, SAN	59	457	7.7
Lawson, DEN	59	393	6.7
Miller, DEN	64	425	6.6

BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DLX/Miller Lite League Awardees

PHOTOS By ROSELYN B. MONROYO

Blue Haus players celebrate their title win with organizers of the 2nd Domino Lux International Fraternity Basketball Invitational Friendship/Miller Lite League last Saturday at the Gualo Rai Basketball Court.

Players and supporters of runner-up QQ Rent A Car pose with their trophy.

Players of pennant champion and Sportsmanship Award recipient Sunrisers/Island Apparel pose with league organizers.

From left, Mythical Team members, QQ Rent A Car's Elgene Mangali, Joe Ito (representing Shirley's teammate Bruce Berline), Sunrisers/Island Apparel's Jawn Joyner, QQ's Rolly Paraiso, and Blue Haus' Elmer Esdrelon.

Andhok's Grille players receive the fourth place trophy.

QQ Rent A Car's Elgene Mangali shows his regular season MVP award.

Blue Haus' Dante Olivos, left, poses with his Best Coach award with league commissioner Pando Muleta.

Best in free throws award winner Brendon Talania, center, of Blue Haus receives his trophy from DLX's Noel David and Pando Muleta.

Blue Haus' Sam Fernandez, center, poses with his best in steals trophy with DLX members.

76ers make playoffs for 2nd straight season
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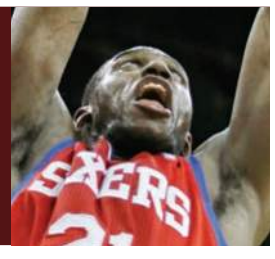

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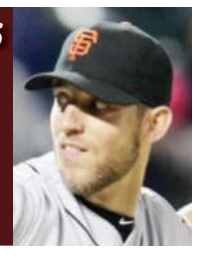

CNMI debuts vs NKorea in AFC tourney

C. Cruzat

W. Hinson

A. Hinson

D. Hall

C. Aninzo

J. Tanghal

W. Kim

J. Pellegrino

D. Auther

J. Fruit

G. Borja

J. Masga

J. Auther

L. Calayag

R. Tanzawa

E. Aniana

W. Tajima

J. Butcher

K. Izuka

J. Ermitanio

J. Galarion

M. Villanueva

By ROSELYN B. MONROYO
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REPORTER

The CNMI U14 National Team will be playing its first game in the AFC U-14 Boys' Festival of Football for East Asia against North Korea today in Beijing, China.

The Commonwealth strikers will face the tough North Koreans at 10:30am (12:30pm on Saipan) at the China National Football Training Center and will play two more games in the opening day of the four-day competition. Next up for the CNMI is Chinese-Taipei at 3pm and Guam at 4:30pm.

Suiting up for the CNMI in Beijing are 22 players led by 2011 East Asian Football Federation U15 Youth Tournament veterans Dakota Hall, William Hinson II, Jordan Butcher-Wade, Joel Fruit, and Ken-

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Butch leads SCA bike race winners

By ROSELYN B. MONROYO
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REPORTER

Butch Sublemente ruled the MTB long course division of the SCA MTB & Road Race 3 held last Sunday in the northern portion of the island.

Sublemente completed the course that brought bikers to Marianas Country Club (Binadu Drive), FEBC, Banzai trail, Santa Claus lane (Grotto trail), Autobahn trail, Kalabera Road, one million gallon tank, and back to MCC en route to the finish line at Mariana Resort in 1:02:36, less than a minute ahead of runner-up Charlie Sendin (1:03:23). It was Sublemente's second win in the same race, as he defeated Lewie Tenorio and Anthony Aguilar in SCA Race 2 in August last year.

Tenorio also joined this year's race, but settled for third place in the Saipan Cyclers Association-organized event after clocking in at 1:05:20.

Ten others joined the MTB long course, including lone female rider Robyn Wondrasek,

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO
Butch Sublemente heads to the finish line of last Sunday's SCA MTB & Road Race 3.

who timed in at 1:29:51, beating two male riders. Other finishers were Ken Pierson (1:07:50), Mark Isip (1:08:12), Noel Altamirano (1:09:00), John Arceo (1:09:20), Kaisei Toda (1:12:08), Mario Galang (1:12:08), John Parungao (1:31:41), and Alex Sablan (1:41:35).

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Comets' Mendiola swinging 0.744 in Majors

By WALTER CEPEDA SUTHERLAND
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REPORTER

Prior to the weekend's Saipan Little League Baseball Major Division matchups at the Miguel "Tan Ge" Basa Pangelinan Ballfield, Rep. Joseph P. Guerrero Dandan Comets' leadoff batter Aurel Mendiola remains alone in first place on the batting chart with 29 hits in 39 at bats for a 0.744 batting average.

Mendiola currently leads the league in RBIs (20), runs (27), triples (5), and holds a share in a six-way tie in the doubles race. He swung 3-for-3 in the Comets' last regular season game last Saturday with a double, two runs, and a stolen base.

Meanwhile, there is an exciting Junior League pitching race over at the Francisco "Tan Ko" Palacios Ballfield between IT&E-Fielders' Jonathan Camacho and DPS Dare Program-Leep-Enforcers' Darrion Jones. Both players share a 3.23 Earned Run Average from the mound.

WALTER CEPEDA SUTHERLAND
The Dandan Comets' Aurel Mendiola, seen here in a file photo, is leading the Majors in batting with a 0.744 average.

Other division notables include IT&E Ol'Aces' Virgil Secharmidal, who remains the ace on the mound in the Majors. Hawaiya Technologies, Inc.-Ol'Aces' slugger Mike Muna, for his part, has seized the top position on the junior hitting chart.

Behind Mendiola comes DPS Dare Program Enforcers' Kier Agda (0.677), Comets' Ethan Babauta (0.667), Talaabwogh Falcons' Benen Iguel (0.591), Pacific Amusement Rays' Nathaniel Torres (0.560) and Jay Kalen (0.556), Secharmidal (0.538), Enforcers' Dennis Cabrera (0.481, Natibu Tanapag Braves' Andres Camacho (0.480), and Bank of Saipan Red Sox's Ryan Aguon (0.478) with seven others batting 0.400 or better.

Agda's 18 RBIs positions him in front of second placer Secharmedal (17), while As Matuis Twins' Richard John Atalig (14) and Red Sox's Delin Ruesora (11) lead a handful of others with 10.

Agda's nine homeruns topped the field ahead of Mendiola's six, while Secharmedal and Atalig have hammered three thus far.

Secharmidal's four triples marks second place with seven others at two apiece, while Babauta, San Vicente A's Christian Lizama, Enforcers' Joaquin Saralu, Secharmidal, and Enforcers' Shakobe Rangamar, along with Mendiola, all have five doubles with Agda, Rays' Manuel Celis, Iguel, Red Sox's Chabo Leon Guerrero, and Braves' Brandon Pua trailing by one. Babauta, Cabrera, and Secharmidal have 19 runs apiece to Agda's 18.

In pitching, Secharmidal (5-

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Expensive Pacific Games trip for CNMI

By ROSELYN B. MONROYO
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REPORTER

The 2019 Pacific Games will be an expensive trip for the CNMI.

The Commonwealth is expected to face funding challenges should it decide to compete in the quadrennial meet seven years from now after the Pacific Games Council received bids for the 2019 event from Tahiti and Tonga.

White

"The cost to get to Tonga is about the same as Tahiti, very expensive," Northern Marianas Amateur Sports Association president Michael White said in an email forwarded to NMASA members.

Airfare alone for either a trip to Tahiti or Tonga cost around $2,000, according to an airline having flights to the two Polynesian nations.

Add to the airfare the $35 per diem Tonga is proposing. Tahiti's per diem charges is pegged at $30 and it is allotting $100 million for the hosting of the Pacific Games. It is proposing 13 compulsory sports, excluding baseball (which the CNMI won in last year's Pacific Games in New Caledonia) and also 13 optional events.

Tonga is hoping to host the Pacific Games for the first time at a lower budget—$70 million—and is expected to build

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